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Turning Pointe: the lived experience of embodied occupational identity in professional ballet dancers.

Paula Monica Fitzgerald

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy to the Department of Organizational Psychology,
School of Business, Economics and Informatics, Birkbeck, University of London.

Declaration

I declare that all work presented represents the author's own work.

Paula Monica Fitzgerald

Abstract

Classical ballet is the most physically demanding of the performing arts, where the body is at the centre of the task, and the primary means of expression. Engaged in a silent craft, ballet dancers are driven to train from a young age to embody an occupation where discipline and a vocabulary of movement and patterns are etched into their bodies. They push their bodies beyond normal boundaries, placing them perpetually on the edge of injury. The combination of their passion, a short career span, and a show-must-go-on culture, renders ballet dancers vulnerable and their careers fragile. Yet, ballet is poorly understood as 'work'.

This study examines an occupation where the body is crafted for purpose. It identifies three relationships to the body and the tensions between them that underpin ballet dancers' experience of their embodied occupational identity. Age(ing), a multi-layered embodied marker of identity, is addressed in relation to its influence on the lived experience of being a ballet dancer.

Focusing on how my individual participants (n=12) experienced their embodied occupational identity, my study takes an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, a less visited methodology in Organisational Studies (OS). IPA was augmented to include the use of participant-led photography to facilitate the deeper exploration of nuanced individual experiences.

My study makes a timely and reflexive contribution to the burgeoning stream of research in OS, exploring the body/identity nexus beyond discourse. Located in a 'youth-venerating' context, my research makes the case for the temporal nature of age(ing) to be addressed throughout the lifecycle of a career rather than as an event at the nexus of retirement. My data illuminates the lived experience of how professional ballet dancers experience corporeality in an aesthetically normative context. This signposts the need for the un/doing of linear chrononormativity, and the deployment of alternative conceptualisations of age in the process of organising work. My study gives voice and offers valuable insights into a high performing, but understudied, occupation in OS.

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1 Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In the UK, classical ballet is part of an internationally recognised performing artform that is steeped in centuries' old European traditions (Wulff, 2001). It contributes both locally and internationally to the cultural and ambassadorial footprint of the UK. Ballet is a sub-set of the arts and culture sector generating £10.47bn in 2019 (Woodhouse and Hutton, 2021) to the UK economy and creates ancillary employment in adjacent occupations and industries (e.g.: travel, tourism, hospitality, retail, lighting and sound engineering, theatrical costume, stage set design and manufacturing, etc.).

Classical ballet is the most physically demanding of the performing arts, where the body is at the centre of the task, and the primary means of expression (Aalten, 2004). Engaged in a silent craft, becoming a ballet dancer requires a very high degree of commitment and dedication commencing at a very young age. Despite its long-standing traditions, ballet has seen an increase in athleticism, combined with the requirement to perform mixed repertoire to meet contemporary demands and attract new audiences (Allen and Wyon, 2008). These demands tend to lead to overwork, wear and tear, and ultimately injury (Turner and Wainwright, 2003; Bolling, et al., 2021; Shaw, et al., 2021). This combination, together with characteristically short careers and a show-must-go-on culture, renders ballet dancers vulnerable and their careers fragile. Ballet is becoming a more extreme occupation, yet it is poorly understood as 'work' (Kelman, 2000).

Traditionally, Organisational Studies (OS) have subscribed to social constructionist thinking founded in the Cartesian mind/body duality, privileging the mind where social discourse becomes the medium for identity construction (Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2021). This positions the body epistemologically inferior to the mind in relation to the social world (Anderson, 2003). In this context, the body is perceived as a biologically oriented function and defined as being socially constructed (Wolkowitz, 2006; Shilling, 2012). Discourse has, therefore, been deemed to be the determinant of the body, and renders it an "absent presence" (Leder, 1990, p. 1; Shilling, 2012, p. 12). Excluding the body from identity construction understates an inextricable component of identity (Lawrence, et al., 2022). In more recent times, there has been a turn to the material body where it is perceived as comprising of "a complex network of embedded systems (e.g.: respiratory, musculoskeletal, kinaesthetic)" that function within the individual's consciousness as well as non-consciously (Lawrence, et al., 2022, p. 5). The body's materiality is also conceptualised in its biological terms (i.e.: flesh, skin and bone)

but with a specific focus on how it is incorporated into the socio-political relationships between the organisation and the individual (Attala and Steel, 2009).

My study responds to the call for a closer focus on the embodied dimension in relation to work and work practices (Knights and Clarke, 2017; Brown, 2020). It supports the case for placing the emphasis on the body/identity nexus (Courpasson and Monties, 2017; van Amsterdam and van Eck, 2019; Sergeeva, Faraj and Hyusman, 2020; Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2021) as opposed to the privileged mind discursive perspective to identity construction (Wolkowitz, 2006; Knights and Clarke, 2017). It also shifts the focus of identity from the perspective of the organisation to the experiential and material body as perceived by the individual (Lawrence, et al., 2022). This shift is supported by studies based on 'dirty work' where demeaning manual labour highlights the role of the materiality and symbolic meaning of the body (Simpson and Simpson, 2018). However, while these studies have advanced the role of the body/identity nexus at work, further research in relation to the more holistic meaning attached to the embodied notion of identity is required (Simpson and Simpson, 2018).

My study reveals that my participants navigate tensions between three notions of the body: the idealised (Foster, 1997), object and subject bodies (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). These tensions constitute the embodied balletic occupational identity, simultaneously conveying a sense of reflection, constrained agency, and of *being done to* (Pouthier and Sondak, 2021), by the ballet sub-culture. Expressed through the nuances, these tensions are enshrined in the range of divergences and paradoxes constituting my participants' individual experiences.

Age is a specific characteristic of embodied identity which is etched into the body and a principal tool for organising at work. It has a significant role to play in the way we think, who we are, and the way we act, yet it remains overlooked in OS particularly in relation to other protected characteristics (Thomas, et al., 2014; Ainsworth, 2020). Age, therefore, is not just a number (Fineman, 2014). In an occupation where the body is at the centre of the task, any subtle change to it becomes a highly charged and sensitive issue for the dancer. Dancers tend to *feel* their age before it becomes visible to others (Wulff, 2001). Age(ing) therefore points to a multi-layered, complex, phenomenon where it far outweighs any notion of the dancers' chronological age (Riach and Cutcher, 2014). Because of its prominence in respect of the body, and the cardinal role that it plays at the body/identity nexus, I isolated age(ing) as a separate question for investigation in my study.

My interest, therefore, was to investigate the embodied lived experience of the occupational identities of professional ballet dancers rather than an abstract socio-political interpretation of identity inherent in constructionist approaches (Gallagher and

Zahavi, 2008). I adopted a critical realist ontology recognising that there is an independent reality out there, but that reality can be understood through subjective lived experience (Fade, 2004). Epistemologically then knowledge is recognised to go beyond discourse, incorporating both verbal and non-verbal cues (Sims-Schouten, Riley and Willig, 2007). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a methodology is congruent with critical realist ontology and perceives experience to be embedded in a complex layered context (Smith, 2004). It tends to concentrate on richer description and interpretation rather than explanations of the phenomenon to uncover deeper layers of meaning and new interpretations relating to each individual experience (Sims-Schouten, Riley and Willig, 2007).

Deploying IPA, my study investigated the experiences of 12 participants, male and female, where I conducted semi-structured interviews incorporating voluntary participant-led photography (Silver and Farrants, 2016; Kings, Knight and Moulding, 2020) that facilitated a more nuanced approach to individual experiences informing their phenomenological lived self.

Alongside the emergent stream of recent embodied studies (van Amsterdam and van Eck, 2019; Sergeeva, Faraj and Hyusman, 2020; Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2021; Jammaers and Zanoni, 2021; Pouthier and Sondak, 2021; Jammaers and Ybema, 2022; Lawrence, et al., 2022,) my research specifically furthers understanding of the subject body (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962) and its role in occupational identity construction and experience (Knights and Clarke, 2017). It also advances understanding of professional ballet as work and illuminates the experience of alternative conceptualisations of age in the workplace. It specifically addresses age(ing) and its temporal nature (Jack, Riach and Bariola, 2019), mutating over the course of an individual's career, making it a special case for consideration (Ainsworth, 2020).

In the interest of disambiguation, and to avoid misinterpretation with overlapping related definitions, I define an 'embodied occupation' to mean an occupation where the body is at the centre of the task and, through specific training, has been crafted for purpose.

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

In the following sub-sections I set out succinctly an overview of the structure of my thesis commencing with a discussion putting ballet as work into context.

1.2.1 Chapter 2 – Ballet Context

I start by discussing ballet as an occupation within the context of society with a specific focus on elite professional ballet in the UK. Chapter 2 commences with a brief history of the development of ballet originating within the European royal courts. I discuss the background that gives rise to its rich artistic tradition and how the playground of the royal courts became a remunerated performing artform.

Since ballet has been under-researched from an OS perspective in the UK, I set out pertinent facts of the occupation including their conditions of employment, how the industry is organised from a labour perspective, aspects relating to retirement from the craft, and factors influencing the body including the risks of physical injury inherent in the occupation. I conclude the chapter by addressing these hazards and comment on interventions that ballet institutions have been addressing in terms of health and wellbeing of their employees – the dancers.

1.2.2 Chapter 3 – Literature Review

In Chapter 3, I commence by briefly addressing the theory related to occupational identity. The reminder of the chapter is structured in three main parts that address the role and functionality of the body in relation to its social interpretation (Foucault,1977), its socio-political interrelationships (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1990), and its theorised lived experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). I address the extant empirical literature by taking a wider approach beyond OS due to the paucity of studies specifically within the field. I conclude the chapter with my rationale for adopting a phenomenological approach to the study of embodied lived experience and the particular focus on age(ing) as an embodied characteristic informing the lived experience of occupational identity.

A special issue of the International Journal of Management Reviews (Corlett, et al., 2017) 'Exploring the Registers of Identity Research' recommended, inter alia, that the embodied notions of identity be explored deploying alternative lenses to the predominant discursive and symbolic approaches prevailing (Knights and Clarke, 2017). By then I had already concluded that a phenomenological approach should be adopted but with this elevated focus and, the response by researchers to the call, I had additional material to consider (e.g.: Courpasson and Monties, 2017; Brown, 2020), giving rise to an iterative process for my literature review for the reminder of my study. The material turn, as more recently surveyed in OS, has brought the body into focus in relation to the interrelationship between the organisation and the individual (Lawrence, et al., 2022). However, there remains scope for further study taking a first-person approach, placing

the individual at the centre of attention and addressing their lived experience of their occupational identity (Tomkins and Eatough, 2013).

A notable feature of the literature review chapter is that it was constructed iteratively, commencing prior to analysis, but then subsequently adapted to incorporate those elements as they were identified from the findings. Accordingly, concepts such as the 'Idealised body', 'Object body' and 'Subject body' were induced from the data.

1.2.3 Chapter 4 – Researcher's Reflexivity

My insider knowledge and experience of the industry along with strong sense of identity related to the balletic occupation, and the propensity for bias, led me to take an enhanced reflexive approach to the process of my study. In particular, I identified early on that there was a mirroring of contexts relating specifically to the pressures experienced by ballet dancers and investment bankers, career paths with which I am familiar. While the embodied experiences differed, the degree of competition and the resultant preparation, poise and determination that are required for entrée into the occupations are similar. Both industries are youth-venerating, have a multinational workforce, are hierarchical in nature with control centralised in hands of demanding management. The signs of ageing within these occupations are poorly tolerated by individuals and the organisation alike (Riach and Cutcher, 2014) and this has implications for their occupational identities. As with most larger institutions, organisational immortality commands a high premium of its participants with its concomitant pressures and consequences (Riach and Kelly, 2015).

My exposure to both industries, and my closeness to the lived experience of both gave rise to not only my concern for bias but also my emotional response given my early unplanned departure from ballet, an occupation that I loved. Consequently, I operationalised an iterative process of reflexive review including the maintenance of a journal, together with careful consideration of the double hermeneutic and my reaction to my participants' responses in the data. During the analysis process I was careful to reflect on my reaction to my participants accounts and to endeavour to draw a clear distinction between their voice and mine.

1.2.4 Chapter 5 – Research Methodology

From a methodological perspective, I adopted an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) to my study because of its suitability to the in-depth analysis of individual accounts. IPA is a strand of phenomenology, influenced by

hermeneutics, underpinned by the work of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Gadamer (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). The value of IPA, which aims to understand the intricacies of human experience, is in its idiographic commitment and its twin-faceted 'double-hermeneutic' approach to interpretation (Smith and Osborn, 2003). This idiographic focus allows for very detailed analysis of a small sample of individual accounts, providing an effective methodology for addressing the needs of my study (Wagstaff, et al., 2014).

The double hermeneutic process, whereby the participant endeavours to express their interpretation of their lived experience of the phenomenon, and the researcher endeavours to interpret the participant's interpretation is an inherent characteristic of IPA where it recognises the role of the researcher in the process of co-construction of meaning along with the participants (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). It acknowledges that it is impossible to bracket one's life experiences, but IPA still requires of the researcher to keep an open mind during the process of interpretation (Finlay, 2009). The researcher, therefore, continually considers their positioning, an aspect that I have addressed in Chapter 4 (Researcher's Reflexivity chapter).

In this chapter I address my motivation for the inclusion of visual methods. I included participant-led photography (Silver and Farrants, 2016; Kings, Knight and Moulding, 2020) as an adjunct source of data collection and as a mechanism to provide for greater participant engagement and ownership with the interview process. The operationalisation for the inclusion of participant-led photography is dealt with in more detail in the Method Chapter (Chapter 6) below.

I conclude Chapter 5 by addressing the limitations of the IPA methodology as well as the specific additional considerations relating to the inclusion of visual methods. Whilst visual methods provide an additional opportunity for co-production of meaning and greater in-depth understanding by both the participant and the researcher, it introduces further complications in relation to the maintenance of participant anonymity, particularly in a small field such as ballet.

1.2.5 Chapter 6 – Research Method

After re-stating my research questions for the convenience of the reader and setting out my objectives relating to those questions, I address the ethical implications for the study as a whole. The wellbeing of my participants remained at the centre of my focus throughout, along with their comfort with the process and my taking every effort to preserve their anonymity. I ensured that they were aware of the occupational counselling support available that they could avail themselves from if the need arose.

I address in some detail the recruitment process for my participants including criteria for inclusion and exclusion. Since the participants were recruited individually and independently of their organisations, I had to ensure that the access and interview process did not compromise them in any way. The recruitment planning process included consideration for the constraint on the small sample size given the idiographic characteristic of IPA, and to ensure that I had suitable participants to meet all the requirements of my study. I discuss the elements relating to the Research Project Information Sheet provided to prospective recruits, along with the documentation presented to participants prior to the interviews. I ensured compliance with the ethical procedures of the university.

In this chapter, I present the characteristics of my participants with due care and consideration for their anonymity. With the inclusion of visual methods in the IPA interview process, I discuss the pilot study of one participant that I included in the process to ensure the smooth running of the semi-structured interviews and to confirm that the participant-led images would contribute, and not detract from, the dialogue. The main study was modelled on the pilot study, and the process relating to the interviews is discussed. In particular, I explain the approach taken to the inclusion of the visual methods along with the specific additional ethical requirements related to the presence of images within my research.

I consider my approach to interview transcription, and data analysis which I conducted in line with the requirements of IPA. I conclude the chapter with a series of examples depicting the key stages in the data analysis process.

1.2.6 Chapter 7 – Findings

The tensions that my participants experienced in relation to the three notions of the body reflect that they work on their visible and tangible object-body as *a tool* in order to operationalise it and narrow the tension with the idealised body, whilst living their subject-bodies reflexively. My findings are arranged in line with the super-ordinate themes and their constituent sub-themes identified.

I commence with the super-ordinate theme: '*Pursuing the Dream'* which encompasses three constituent sub-themes. This super-ordinate theme broadly addresses those aspects of the occupation that motivate my participants to construct their balletic occupational identities. The sub-theme '*On A Different Plane to the Rest of the World'* reveals my participants' sense of feeling special to be part of the occupation. '*Choreographers Want Blood'* reflects my participants' experiences of responding to the controls of the organisation and the demand for high performance and perfection.

'*Pursuing the Idealised Body'* explores my participants' lived experience of perpetually pursuing a narrowly defined subjective interpretation of the idealised balletic body that some of my participants described paradoxically in terms resembling something amazing, but not human.

My participants experienced tensions between the idealised body, valorised by the ballet sub-culture, and their object-body that they faced on a daily basis reflected in the studios' wall-to-wall mirrors. In this super-ordinate theme '*Mirror, Mirror on the Wall'* my participants perform and work *on* and *with* their social object-body in compliance with the demands of the organisation in an effort to close the gap with the idealised body. In the process, they treat their '*Body as a Tool'* by othering it in order to distance themselves and to operationalise it for the task. My participants' predominant position challenged the notion that a complete ballet dancer is solely their body aesthetic. They argued that, instead, the ballet artist *('The Artist Within')* is more holistically constituted of a balanced 'package' comprising bodily aesthetic; technical skills; and artistic interpretation.

The final super-ordinate theme in my study '*On the Other Side of the Curtain'* is concerned with that aspect of my participants' experience that, unlike their object body, is known only to the individual and constitutes their embodied lived experience of the occupation. They encounter differing degrees of the '*Shades of Passion and Sacrifice'* ranging from the sublime and positive aspects of passion to the more undesirable dark side where overzealous passion leads unhealthy behaviours. Sacrifice is the shadow of calling and passion (Levoy, 2015) which all of my participants encountered one way or another.

An aspect of the balletic occupation is that ballet dancers live their functional age which they experience as *'The Ultimate Betrayal'* at a phase in their careers, generally, where their artistry is in the ascendancy. Not surprising then, the notion of youthful ageing was a subject that my more seasoned participants found very difficult to articulate. '*Ageing – The Reluctance Pas de Deux'* sub-theme was included to depict just how difficult it was for them to face the issue of ageing and what it meant to them in terms of their occupational identity. Their yearning for their younger selves and the interventions that they deployed to counteract the physical consequences of ageing, whilst in their chronological prime, is ensconced in '*The Final Curtain'* sub-theme. My participants chronicled their lonely path to career transitioning, shocked by the onset of the final phases of their active on-stage careers coming to a close.

1.2.7 Chapter 8 – Discussion, Contributions, and Recommendations

In this final chapter, I answer the research questions and discuss the key findings that I identified in my data relating to the three super-ordinate themes and their constituent sub-themes. I address the tensions that my participants lived in relation to the idealised, object, and subject bodies. I acknowledge the iterative process relating to the literature review and how that developed in line with the analysis process and my reflexive practice throughout the study.

I reviewed my study in respect of its methodological integrity as it relates to sensitivity to context, commitment to rigour, coherence, and transparency (Yardley, 2015). I then considered the impact and importance of my study to stakeholders. I highlighted the theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions that my study made to the study of embodied occupational identity and age(ing) in the workplace. This led me to address implications for further research that could build upon my findings together with recommendations for future practice in the occupation.

In conclusion, I summarised the key findings of my study that advanced OS knowledge in relation to the embodied occupational identity of professional ballet dancers at work and the influence that age had on their lived experience of the occupation.

2 Chapter 2: Ballet as Work

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I introduced the topic of my study and set out the case for, and areas of concern about, professional ballet as work. I explained my interest in researching the role of the body and ageing in identity construction in the context of an embodied occupation. Identity is hard to understand outside of its specific context and it is, therefore, important for me to contextualise where my research is located (Rousseau and Fried, 2001). This chapter addresses ballet in the context of work, and its place in society in the UK.

I commence by discussing its origins in the European Royal Courts and its conversion to professional status in Europe and Russia. I then address ballet's development in the performing arts sector in the UK. In so doing, I frame my discussion in the particular context of elite professional ballet, an aesthetic performing artform marked by rich tradition. The culture of professional ballet is inculcated through the training regimes and perpetuated within the companies through their hierarchical structures and traditions. Professional ballet in the context of the wider performing arts is a sub-culture that has its own unwritten rules of engagement that are passed on from one generation to the next. Therefore, in the context of this thesis, when I refer to the ballet sub-culture I am making reference to this sub-sector within the performing arts.

The heart of this chapter relates to ballet as employment where I address a range of parameters including the fact that dancers are subject to terms and conditions of employment, are organised as unionised labour with central bargaining conditions, and with no specified retirement age as is usual in the UK. It is an occupation framed by high levels of uncertainty given its subjective management processes, its structure, and high risk of physical injury. I conclude this chapter by discussing the occupational hazards inherent in ballet and what institutions are doing to enhance ballet dancers' health and wellbeing, and industry arrangements to facilitate post-career transition planning.

2.2 The Origins of Professional Ballet

In this section, I summarise the key milestones that marked the origin and development of ballet from Royal Court entertainment to the artform known today. As an overview, I begin by presenting an abbreviated table to highlight the chronology of development of the artform across the ages. That is followed by a succinct discussion of the influences on the artform and the changing roles of both male and female dancers across time.

Table 1 - Chronology of Ballet Development

Milestones	Institution	Date Established
Italian Court	Royal Household patronage	14th-17th century
French Court	Académie Royale de Danse – formalising the ballet craft	1661
St Petersburg Imperial Court	Imperial Theatre School [now Vaganova Academy] established	1738
Danish Court	Royal Danish Ballet School and Theatre are established	1771
Moscow Imperial Court	Development towards the establishment of Petrovski Theatre (today Moscow State Academy of Choreography [Bolshoi] mirroring the French Académie Royale de Danse)	1773
Ballerinas take centre stage	'Romantic Ballet' era was born and spread quickly across Europe and Russia.	1830-1840
Male Danseur	Vaslav Nijinsky, and Ballet Russes, restores male virtuosity on stage.	1900
UK	Danish ballerina Adeline Geneé formalised ballet into Britain	1900-1910

The earliest forms of ballet started life as an established entertainment form within the royal court in Renaissance Italy (14th-17th century) (Anderson, 2015). Having had its original roots in European folk dance, ballet evolved through the inclusion of etiquette in the royal courts (Brinson, 1989). This association with royalty earned ballet a reputation for being glamorous and elitist which prevails to this day (Wulff, 1998). Although in the Renaissance period the elitism and the exclusionary practices were due to wealth, status, and power rather than ability and body suitability (Khudaverdian, 2006).

The artform found its way from Italy to the royal courts of France through Catherine de Medici in 1533. It was through her patronage that the first *Ballet Comique de la Reine* in Paris was set up in 1581 (Wulff, 2008). Through her lineage both Louis XIII and Louis XIV carried on that tradition. Louis XIV (1643-1715) became known as 'the Sun King' partly as a result of his fascination with ballet. It was during this dynasty that ballet shifted from an amateur aristocratic activity to becoming a professional artform (1661). Notably at the time, female roles were performed by boys as was the custom during the 17th century Shakespearean time (Anderson, 2015).

During the 18th century, ballet based on mime, movement and dance (*ballet d'action)* became a recognised artform in itself, as opposed to a supporting act to singing or poetry. Under the hand of the *Académie Royale de Musique's* ballet master Jean-Georges Noverre (1776), ballet gained popularity across Europe spreading to the imperial court of Russia. It was there that Empress Anna in St Petersburg established the *Imperial Theatre School*, the first school of theatrical dance. It was this influence and her engagement of French, Italian and Danish ballet masters that ultimately led to the

development of full-length ballets that are well-known throughout the world today (Moscow State Academy of Choreography, 2021).

The 19th century saw training and education regulation implementation and transformative changes. At the beginning, French and Italian teachers delivered ballet tuition but during this century Russians also began teaching at the school. From the very beginning, the ballet school integrated the training of opera singers, ballet dancers, and orchestra musicians to develop a Russian-centric identity. This synergy led to the mutual development of the performing arts and was a very valuable experience for all involved. The end of the 19th century (1895) marked an important development in the history of classical ballet in Russia with the development of a programme that translates as: *Curriculum for Professional Ballet Dancing Classes* by V. Stepanov, from the Mariinsky Theatre (St. Petersburg). This development saw the employment of Russian ballet faculty which virtually eliminated their reliance on foreign teachers which was instrumental in the development of their own Russian artistic identity (Vaganova Academy, 2021).

'Romantic ballet', was born in the mid-19th century and spread quickly across Europe (Craine and Mackrell, 2000). The choreographic focus changed, placing women in the female roles and replacing the young boys that did those roles previously. Women started to command the highest on-stage wages in ballet. The male dancing role became subservient to the ballerina and assume a "porteur" posture (Wulff, 2008, p. 524). The role of management behind the scenes was retained by men, a status quo that largely prevails to this date (Anderson, 2015). Changes in choreography saw the advent of the mystical, 'sylph-like' characters that floated on pointe across the stage giving rise to the demand for ballet dancers to be thinner (Hamilton, 1997). These slender ballerinas embodied supranormal beings (fairies, ghosts, mythical swans) to which gravity laws did not appear to apply (Craine and Mackrell, 2000; Wulff, 2008).

In Denmark, in parallel to the romantic ballet development elsewhere in Europe, August Bournonville (1805-1879) imported and refined 19th century French ballet style to Copenhagen where he developed what today is known today as the *Danish style*. This is a distinctively refined and graceful technique of dancing that includes a particular emphasis on male virtuosity. The return of the male dancer to a more prominent participative position on stage was further enhanced by the influences of Vaslav Nijinsky through the *Ballets Russes* company at the turn of the 20th century. The prominence of the male ballet dancer was further enhanced around the world by the influences of Rudolf Nureyev during mid-20th century (Wulff, 2008) – an influence that remains prevalent to this day.

Prevailing into contemporary times, George Balanchine (1904-1983), a Russian-born American choreographer trained at the *Imperial Theatre School* in St Petersburg, Russia, revolutionised ballet in the US developing more than 400 new works, some of which have been danced in many elite ballet companies around the world. As part of the development of his own dance style and choreography, he championed the super-thin, taller ballerina, that has had an influence as well across other ballet companies around the world (Ritenburg, 2010). It is his onslaught on the female ballet body form that drew the ire of the feminist movement accusing ballet of misogynistic practices (Daly, 1987). It was Balanchine's obsession with ultra-thinness (Farrell, 1997; Kirkland, 1986), and those vocational ballet schools and ballet companies that supported his aesthetic ideal, that saw the rise of unhealthy practices across the industry that was critiqued by Vincent (1979, 1989). Being a medical doctor specialised in dance injuries, Vincent saw first-hand the health and wellbeing havoc that clinging on to these unrealistic ideals was having on ballet students and young dancers alike. He sought to shine a light on and expose the detrimental effect that these extreme requirements were having on the dancers.

Overall, Russian ballet remains a prominent international influence where the renowned 'Bolshoi Ballet' in Moscow, and the 'Mariinsky Ballet' in St. Petersburg, are the leading ballet companies in the Russian Federation, and have produced numerous ballet stars during the 20th and 21st Centuries (Vaganova Academy, 2021; and Moscow State Academy of Choreography, 2021). Whilst 'national' dancing styles and approaches do differ (e.g.: Balanchine; Bournonville; Cecchetti; Vaganova), discipline, vocabulary and technique remain congruent throughout. Ballet remains a powerful cultural and ambassadorial influence throughout the world with companies in major cities throughout Europe, North and South America, and as far afield as Australia, China and Japan (Wulff, 2008).

This brief backdrop depicts the shift from an artform driving etiquette and royal court behaviour in Europe, to becoming a professional occupation for ballet dancers. In the following section I address the development of professional ballet in the UK.

2.3 The Contribution of Ballet to UK Society

In the 18th century dance was incorporated into London's polite society from Europe in support of the development of graceful manners through body movement and appropriate gestures and body language (Brinson, 1989). Dance was seen as a way of inculcating a moral code for the body that developed elegance and gentleness. Classical ballet continues to exert these influences in certain sectors of society (Brinson, 1989). It

was only in the early 20th century that ballet, as a professional practice, came into being in the UK.

2.4 UK Professional Ballet History

Ballet has no native British roots. It was thought to be of French, Italian, Danish and Russian origin (Homans, 2013). Danish ballerina Adeline Geneé was the first to establish classical ballet in Britain as an appreciated artform during the first decade of the 20th century. This was followed by the significant cultural and aesthetic impact that the arrival of Sergei Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes de Monte-Carlo* had in London. Seeking to preserve the legacy of Diaghilev after his death in 1929, the influential economist John Maynard Keynes, established the 'Camargo Society'. He supported his wife, the Diaghilev's ballerina Lydia Lopokova in nurturing a home-grown English ballet company (Homans, 2013).

A member of the 'Camargo Society' Ninette de Valois (passionately known as 'Madam') established the *Academy of Choreographic Art* in 1926 and collaborated with the entrepreneurial Lilian Baylis who, at the time, was running the Old Vic Theatre in London and refurbished the Sadler's Wells Theatre where the school and the ballet company took residence (Vic-Wells Association, 2021). This development laid the foundation for the formalising of ballet in the UK.

In 1946, the Sadler's Wells Ballet took up residence at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, on its re-opening after the war. Ten years later, in 1956, the ballet company received Royal Charter and was re-named: The Royal Ballet. The Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet, a sister touring company to the Royal Ballet became The Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet in 1977, and in 1990 moved to Birmingham becoming The Birmingham Royal Ballet and attained independence from the Royal Ballet in 1997.

For completeness, British ballet was influential in establishing and developing classical ballet in Canada and Australia. British-born, and trained, ballerina Celia Franca established the National Ballet of Canada in 1951. London-born Dame Peggy van Praagh, DBE was instrumental in the development of The Australian Ballet in Melbourne in the 1960s.

Ballet in the UK has developed into a thriving sector within the performing arts, the characteristics of which are summarised below. My focus is on the five elite ballet companies that receive UK Arts Council/Government funding and benefit from Royal patronage.

Ballet is by no means a large industry, however if one considers the contribution of £103 million made by 314 ballet dancers to the UK economy each year, each ballet dancer contributes approximately £328,000. See details in the table below.

Table 2 - UK Elite Ballet Companies Statistics

Description	Royal Ballet	Birmingham Royal Ballet	English National Ballet	Northern Ballet	Scottish Ballet	Total
Annual Revenue (£)	£55,664,550	£15,419,966	£17,293,000	£7,301,727	£7,386,774	**£103,066,017**
Audience Attendance	412,330	129,017	231,404	95,000	107,798	**975,549**
No. of Direct Employees (inc. dancers)	239	197	260	126	107	**929**
No. of Dancers	96	60	75	44	39	**314**
Average No. of Performances	122	127	167	135	123	**674**

Source: *Companies House – Annual Audited Reports 2019/2020.*

Note: For context, I recognise the contribution of the broader dance community to the UK's cultural economy. My research, however, is narrowly focused on classical ballet, and I have drawn my participants from elite ballet companies only. In this table I have included selected vital statistics related to the UK ballet industry but focused on the five internationally recognised companies as identified by the Arts Councils in the UK.

The financial contribution to the UK economy is but the tip of the iceberg. Ballet brings real advantages to the UK on a number of fronts. Firstly, it creates approximately 1,000 direct jobs with the secondary job creation impact typical of most industries (suppliers, secondary services, etc.). Secondly, it has a revenue stream of approximately £103 million serving nearly one million patrons across 674 live performances for year 2019/2020. Included in their revenue, these companies receive £35.5 million Arts Council/Government funding (source: summation from Annual Audited Reports 2019/20 of UK elite ballet companies) which demonstrates the importance of this subsector to the performing arts.

Thirdly, UK ballet has a powerful culture-ambassadorial footprint globally in what can be considered a multi-national, if not international, artform (Wulff, 2001). This can be seen by the 315 million social media users worldwide, and the 5.25 million people who actively viewed the 2019 World's Ballet Day online transmissions (Royal Opera House, 2020).

With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the business models for ballet companies have been adjusted, and future statistics will likely include digital online

streaming performances and other recorded services that will augment their onstage delivery.

These five ballet companies form part of the wider Arts and Entertainment' subsector within the 'Arts and Culture' industries in the UK. The contribution that is made by the 'Arts and Entertainment' subsector is reflected in the table below which is drawn from the most recent full pre-pandemic year (2019):

Table 3 - Cultural Industries Contribution in the UK

Cultural Industries in the UK, 2019	**Economic Output**		**Employment**	
	£ billion	**% UK Total**	**1000s**	**% UK Total**
Arts and Culture	10.47	0.5%	226	0.7%
Of which:				
Arts and Entertainment	7.92	0.4%	119	0.4%
Museums, Libraries and other cultural activities	2.55	0.1%	108	0.3%

Source: *Woodhouse and Hutton, 2021.*

In the UK, dance including ballet further contributes to social well-being, physical and mental health, and education (Arts Council England, 2014).

2.5 Ballet Training

The power of ballet training is that, through discipline and tradition, it can transform an unskilled person into a ballet artist (Khudaverdian, 2006). Through the process of the rigorous training that dancers undergo, not only is the body trained to accommodate the physical requirements of dance, but the structures and style of the schooling inculcates the balletic culture, cements appropriate compliant disposition, acts as a filter that can make or break an aspirant dancer's career, and ultimately has significant bearing on individual's occupational identity from a young age (Pickard, 2015). Undertaking ballet training can be broadly split into two different contexts: a) recreational and wellbeing purposes, where the goal is centred around taking part in a group activity for fun; and b) vocational ballet training, where the objective is to prepare the student for a professional career.

Recreational ballet is often a precursor to more formal training where very young children gain exposure to the principles of movement and coordination. These very early years enable the child to determine whether or not they have the interest, disposition and the right physical attributes that would facilitate a formal career in ballet (Mitchell, 2018).

On the other hand, recreational ballet provides opportunities for adults to partake in the benefits of the physical movement in the presence of music and the enjoyment of dance without having the rigor of a formal career (Buckroyd, 2000).

This activity, embraced regularly, can provide a range of health benefits to individuals: promoting inclusion and social interaction, improving overall flexibility, posture and alignment, coordination, muscle strength, stamina, and general well-being (Jola and Calmeiro, 2017; Fong Yan, et al., 2018). Importantly, dance, music, and movement, have been identified as having a positive impact on people diagnosed and living with Parkinson's disease for example (Westbrook and McKibben, 1989; de Natale, et al., 2017).

Vocational ballet school's raison d'être is the specialist preparation of the next generation of dancers intended for recruitment into professional ballet companies. Schooling is broadly split into two levels: the junior school (students aged 11-15 years old), and the senior division (students aged 16-19 years old) with multiple entry points generally at ages: 11; 16; and the final year of the senior school. Competition for places at these schools is very high. Approximately 898 applications are received every year at the Royal Ballet School for 27 places in Year 7 (Junior School), and 649 applications for 29 places in Year 12 (Senior Division) (Royal Ballet School, 2021).

The exit points for students can be at any time at the end of each learning year where students are individually assessed and progressed, or assessed out, depending on an annual appraisal determining overall performance and suitability for further training. This leaves the student constantly concerned for their continued inclusion which renders them vulnerable *throughout* their learning journey. All of this demanding training and psychological pressure takes place against the background of adolescence, along with physical and emotional changes. This sensitive phase in a teenager's development and growth has profound implications for identity construction (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; Pickard, 2012, 2013).

The reasons for children (aged 11) pursuing vocational training are diverse but the lure of the stage, costumes, a certain admired role model, the spectacle, and the attention could play a part in a child wishing to pursue vocational ballet training (Wulff, 2001). Through immersion in vocational training, ballet represents a significant part of an adolescent's daily activity and influences their identity development (Pickard, 2012). When an aspirant becomes serious about wishing to pursue full-time vocational ballet training, they then enter into the arduous process of preparation, auditioning, and selection.

From the outset, young children find themselves in large studios with wall-to-wall mirrors and panels of adults sitting around ready to adjudicate them. At this very early stage, scrutiny by both teachers and peers starts. Securing a place for full-time vocational ballet training is based on a variety of factors but mostly centred on the student meeting the idealised aesthetic. Vocational ballet schools select students based on their physical potential. However, dance institutions have tended to use screening mechanisms that are not generally validated, resulting in a subjective process and variable outcomes (McCormack, et al., 2019). Attributes including, but not limited to, overall flexibility, strength and hip turnout are considered to be the most required, followed by overall good proportions, slimness, and stamina (McCormack, et al., 2019). Coordination, musicality, spatial awareness, and disposition are sought after characteristics (Royal Ballet School, 2021). Processes to gauge aspirants' interest, and their intellectual and psychological suitability for a career in the craft are, however, largely absent. This, coupled with the pinning of numbers onto children's t-shirts or leotards during audition cycles results in a depersonalisation congruent with the moulding of 18th century soldiers and the concept of 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1977) with its concomitant implications for self-perception and identity loss (Mainwaring, 2019).

The focus for the schools is on talent development as 'feeders' for ballet companies, and they collaborate directly with the companies in this respect. Some ballet schools make it clear in their communications that they are legally allowed to apply a 'permitted form of selection' under the 2010 Equality Act where they would only admit students of the highest potential for classical ballet (Royal Ballet School, 2021).

2.6 Focus on Technique

Central to ballet training is to inculcate ballet technique which is comprised of approximately 200 steps that are codified in French and are performed similarly all over the world (Wulff, 2008). Training is built upon a tradition where, internationally, discipline plays a pivotal role in the ballet pedagogy. These embedded unidirectional systematic schooling methods, where little tolerance is permitted for individual thinking, have the effect of suppressing student individuality and enhancing conformity needed, particularly, in the corps the ballet (Whiteside and Kelly, 2016). Vocational ballet training focuses on making the *unnatural* natural (Aalten, 2005) to the point that it becomes second nature (Bull, 1999), absorbed into the body (Pickard, 2012), and thereby becoming a central part of the dancer's universe. This is not to say that ballet is, or becomes, 'easy'. From the moment that a ballet student comes into the studio they are engaged into a constant tussle, a struggle with their bodies, in order to become a dancer (Khudaverdian, 2006).

Distinctively, ballet dancers maintain a very upright upper body carriage and are characterised by the placing of their feet permanently in a *'10 past 10'* stance when they stand or walk. Defining features of classical ballet, relative to other dance genres, are firstly, classical ballet is characterised by the need to deliver the impression of effortless, gravity-defying, dancing (Anderson, 2015). This is achieved where ballet dancers are taught to 'pull up' their torsos thus lengthening their backs as if being 'pulled' from the crown of their heads. This has the effect of 'lightening' the load on the lower body, making it feel lighter to the dancer, and the resultant uprightness of the upper body.

Secondly, and key, is the requirement for 'turnout'. This is the outward rotation of the leg starting within the hip socket. 'Turnout' is developed from the requisite natural ability of the individual's hips, also involving knees, ankle joints and feet as well as engaging a specific range of muscles that require strengthening and regular maintenance. 'Turnout' is important for a ballet dancer because, physically, it facilitates movement and the extension of the leg beyond 45 degrees (front, side, and rear) and is also more visually pleasing. The lack of turnout ability will be a natural excluder for aspirants. Thirdly and certainly not least, pointe shoes and pointework technique, deployed by ballerinas in order to enhance the visual impression of speed and lightness, are unique to classical ballet (Aalten, 2007).

The challenge of developing ballet skills such as a strong *adage* (slow, graceful, smooth movement involving the whole body); *port de bras* (movement and carriage of arms, head, and shoulders) which communicates style; and the small, fast, intricate footwork and lower leg agility related to the *petit allegro* are examples of basic skills needed to be able to perform competently. As with other dance forms, the need to be able to turn and jump (*grand allegro*) are also essential characteristics that are required in order claim the balletic identity.

The development of a good technique is not only central to the quality of the performance for ballet but also essential in maintenance of muscle strength and mobility in the joints to guard against injury (Howse and Hancock, 2014).

2.7 Ballet as Employment

For professional ballet dancers, dance is work. Dancers are engaged through employment contracts that specify inter-alia, hours of work, salary, rank, place of work, etc. The usual terms and conditions of engagement in an employment contract apply, and they are subject to regulation in accordance with UK employment law. The craft is unionised, and dancers are bound by the collective bargaining arrangements through 'Equity UK'.

2.7.1 Recruitment

The process of joining a ballet company in the UK or being '*offered a contract*' as it is usually called, is – for most dancers - through auditioning, or invitation. Providing dancers have reached a certain standard of training and preparation, being 'offered a contract' with a company is often more about their potential or skill, disposition, fit, being known to ballet staff within the company, the company's needs and budget at any given time and, last but not least, 'being in the right place at the right time'. For ballet dancers, the whole process of recruitment and employment can be *hit and miss*.

In this highly competitive field, being selected to join a company is the culmination of many years of training that have paid off, and the dreams of becoming a professional have been realised (Wainwright and Turner, 2006; Willard and Lavallee, 2016). Being a ballet dancer is the amalgamation a very physical and a very interpretative job that, through the embodiment of movement and music, enables the dancer to be transported to a different world where they can be many different characters: princes, princesses, magicians, fairies, ghosts, swans, dolls, etc. The wearing of pointe shoes is associated with gravity-defying elevation and ethereal symbolism associated with illusiveness and the supernatural world. Some authors go so far as to postulate that the wearing of pointe shoes symbolically places the ballerina above mere mortals (Fraleigh, 1987). A similar argument can be made for male dancers elevating themselves on demi-pointe.

2.7.2 Hierarchy and Management Structure

Elite classical ballet companies are typical medium-size organisations and are organised along formal structured hierarchies. In ballet's hierarchical sub-culture, ballet dancers rank at the bottom of the hierarchy. Everybody else, ranging from artistic administrators, choreographers, ballet masters/mistresses, and Artistic Director are firmly at the top (McEwen and Young, 2011). The constant messaging that pain and injury are part and parcel of the occupation and that 'good' dancers come to terms and cope with it (Wulff, 2008) drives conformity in the face of an authoritarian studio setting where fear of criticism or ostracization drives compliance (Wellard, Pickard and Bailey, 2007). The same studio setting also facilitates self-regulation and peer-pressure that compounds the propensity towards perfectionism (Nordin-Bates and Kuylser, 2021). The opportunities for roles are limited and therefore there is a high level of competitiveness amongst peers within a rank and across ranks within companies (Benn and Walters, 2001). Ballerinas face stiffer competition due to their sheer number wishing to enter the

occupation whilst supply and demand for male dancers is less competitive with a ratio of 13:2 (McEwen and Young, 2011).

The dancers' day-to-day activities are regulated through management structures, casting and selection/de-selection are entirely subjective and at the sole discretion of ballet management, the artistic director, or the choreographer (Aalten, 2005). The power-distance relationship confers upon management outright discretion and imposes upon the dancer unwavering commitment and obedience obligations (McEwen and Young, 2011). Grievance and disciplinary procedures apply as with any other mainstream employment. An annual meeting with the Artistic Director constitutes a performance appraisal where promotion and progress, continuation, or termination of employment are open for discussion. Promotions are at the sole discretion of management, in line with what is observed in mainstream employment.

Where ballet may differ from regular employment arrangements is that the more seasoned principal dancers may negotiate a per-performance fee instead of a salary. Unlike Continental European ballet companies (e.g.: Paris Opera Ballet; Dutch National Ballet; Norwegian National Ballet), UK ballet companies do not have a set retirement age. This aligns with UK employment law practice where retirement is at the discretion of management within certain bounds. These bounds however are adjusted, allowing for ballet dancers to retire at a much earlier chronological age than a regular worker. Lack of certainty, particularly with retirement or career transitioning occurring no later their mid-30s (for corps the ballet dancers in particular) renders the occupation fraught with insecurity, and vulnerability.

2.7.3 Rank and Remuneration

The hierarchy and structure in each of the UK elite ballet companies differ slightly, some have intermediate ranks at varying levels of seniority (e.g.: apprentice; junior soloists; principal character artist; lead principal, etc.), each company generally is comprised of:

Table 4 - Typical Rank and Remuneration at UK Elite Ballet Companies

Rank	**Median Annual Salary**
Principal (basic*)	£53,062
First Soloist	£47,692
Soloist	£40,595
First Artist	£34,841
Artist Year 5	£31,825
Artist Year 1	£26,153

Source: *Annual Equity Pay Rates 2018/19*.

Note: (*) The median annual salary presented above for principal dancers is a basic figure, with some principals earning significantly more depending on their remuneration structure. Male and female dancers are remunerated the same by rank for all other ranks other than principals where individual rates are negotiated.

For comparison purposes, during the same 2018/19 financial year, the average annual salary for a London Underground Tube driver was £52,329 (Transport for London, 2019). A ballet dancer has to exceed the rank of first soloist to earn as much despite the dedication, focus, and decades of training needed to attain the levels of performance required for the role. Whilst odd at first glance, I chose Tube drivers because they are a mainstream recognised employment occupation similarly remunerated to ballet dancers. Tube drivers are unionised and, like ballet dancers, both male and female drivers are present as part of the same team. Although footballers might have also offered a comparison, given the level of training and skill, this would have been less congruent because male and female football players do not participate in the same fixture. Further divergences include their remuneration structures and key objectives being significantly different to ballet dancers (Law, Bloyce and Waddington, 2021).

The total number of dancers within UK elite ballet companies fluctuates year-upon-year depending on a variety of factors encompassing leavers, budget size, and repertoire. The latter is usually decided by the Artistic Director in consultation with the Board of Governors, and the Chairman of the respective company.

2.7.4 Work Schedule

Ballet dancers typically have very long working days in a six-day working week. On average, elite ballet companies in the UK, perform 144 shows per year. During performance periods (usually spanning 2-6 weeks) the corps de ballet and soloists work, on average, an ± 81 hours/week (6 days x 13.5hours [09:30-23:00hrs] = 81 hours/week). Taking the same comparison with London Underground Tube drivers where their schedule should not exceed 48 hours per week (RMT, 2022). The dancing calendar

spans 46 weeks, leaving 6 weeks off per year, usually split as two one-week breaks at mid-season, and 4 weeks off in the Summer (Shaw, et al., 2021).

Work patterns can be variable and unpredictable but, to give a broad picture of a typical day in the life of a ballet dancer, I have offered a summary as follows:

Table 5 - Ballet Company Typical Day Schedule

Typical morning session	**Afternoon schedule – Typical with evening performance**
09:30hrs: Pilates (voluntary)	***Note**: afternoon schedule subject to change if matinee performance included.*
10:30hrs: Company class	14:30 - 15:30hrs Rehearsal [or physiotherapy/costume/head dress fitting]
11:45hrs: 15 mins break	15:30 – 17:00hrs: Break
12:00 -13:30hrs: Rehearsal	17:00 - 19:30hrs: Pre-performance preparation
13:30 -14:30hrs: Lunch	19:30 – 22:00hrs: Performance
	22:00 – 23:00hrs: post-performance activities and departure.
	Afternoon schedule - Typical *non*-performance
	14:30hrs – 16:00hrs: Rehearsal [or costume/headdress fitting]
	16:00hrs – 16:30hrs: Break
	16:30hrs – 17:30hrs: Rehearsal
	17:30hrs – 18:30hrs: Physiotherapy/gyrotonics

Source: Shaw, et al., 2021.

From the above typical daily profile, ballet dancers commence their working day in the morning but, unlike mainstream workers, they will work until 23:00hrs on performance days. Their working schedule has long period of sustained long days which is compounded by bouts of high-intensity activity and interspersed with long periods of low or even inactivity which has implications for health and fitness (Shaw, et al., 2021).

2.8 Culture - A Very Special Community

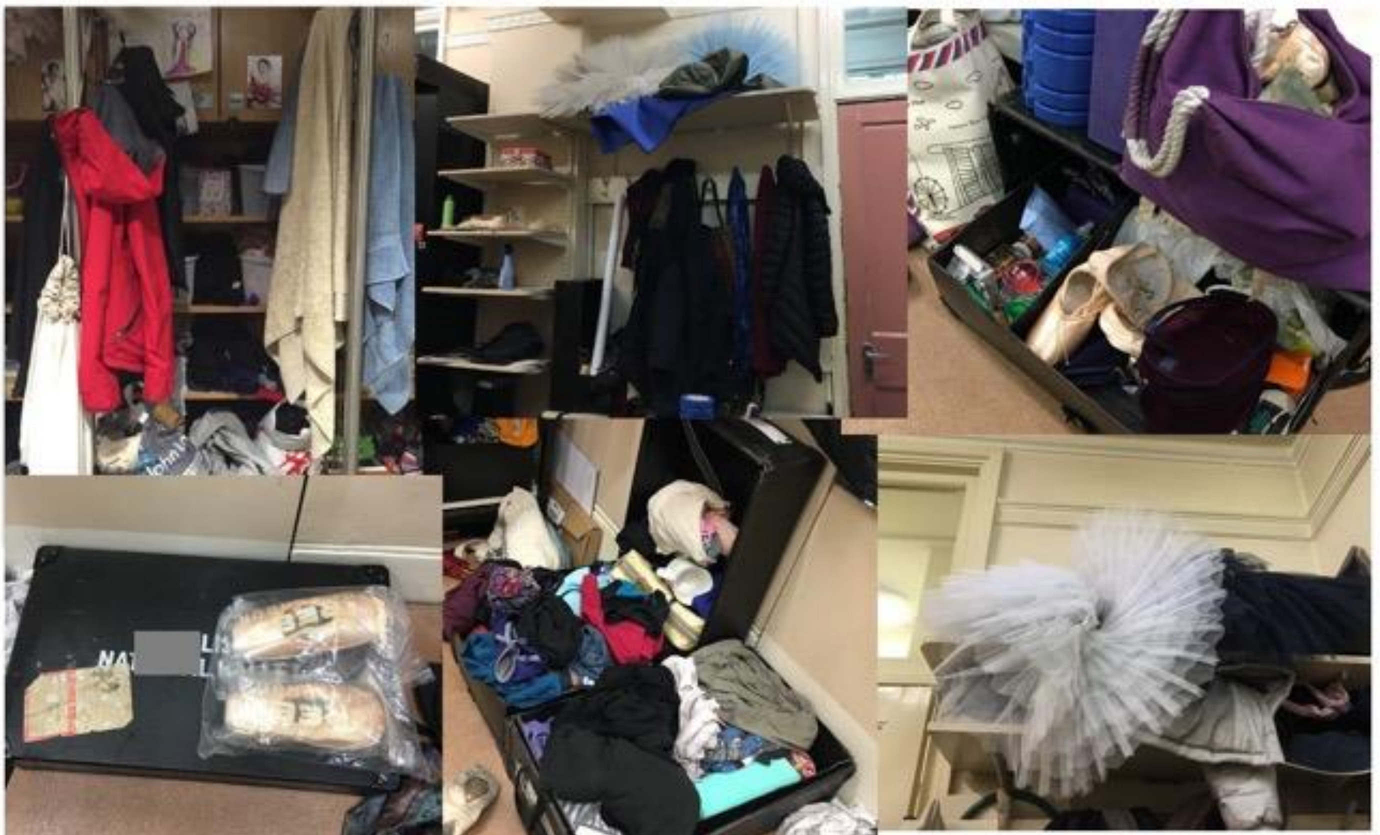
No matter what rank within a ballet company a dancer has achieved, what bonds the transnational community of ballet dancers is the experience of living and breathing ballet, the respect for its traditions, discipline, technique, and sense of purpose (Wulff, 1998). There is also a general sense of having become part of a something ‘special’ (Aalten, 2005; Khudaverdian, 2006) meaning that ballet has a culture which is hard to understand and infiltrate for those looking in from the outside (Roncaglia, 2007).

Some dancers equate ballet to a “secret society” where dancers are likened to “monks” that have, and keep secret, a system of deep-rooted traditions transmitted from one generation to the next (Khudaverdian, 2006, p. 170). This secrecy is not unique to

the ballet world and is an instrument of control that organisations deploy to influence identity construction (Costas and Grey, 2014). It takes an outsider asking questions about something that insiders consider quite normal (e.g.: ‘Good’ pain…. *how can pain be good*?; You do class everyday…. *why*?) to realise that ballet dancers have their own codes and culture that become normalised.

All dancers, by the time they join a professional ballet company, would have undertaken either a combination of recreational, associate, and vocational training, or purely vocational training. Being offered a contract of employment is the ultimate acceptance into this ‘special’ or ‘secret’ world, and the materialisation of what, usually, is a long training period spanning 8-10 years (Bentley, 1987). The excitement of becoming a professional dancer and engaging in the daily routines: company class, rehearsals, ‘living’ and power-napping in changing rooms, preparing touring boxes, sewing and darning pointe shoes and slippers, learning from more experienced dancers the tricks of the trade lead to a close sense of familiarity and camaraderie (see the photo collage below for a typical ladies’ corps de ballet changing room ‘lifestyle’) (Wulff, 1998).

Figure 1 -Collage of Dressing Room 'Living'



Source: *Behind the scenes photography by kind permission of anonymised participants.*

Their long working days and regularly working as a team generates familiarity and comfortableness in each other's company. The untidiness of the changing rooms captured in the images above is commonplace, particularly for the lower ranks where larger changing rooms are shared. Despite this apparent sloppiness in the changing rooms, the demands made on ballet dancers are never ending with goalposts moving constantly. Dancers live under a culture of being constantly judged by ballet management and peers where nothing is ever seen to be perfect enough (Nordin-Bates and Kuylser, 2021). This has an influence on behaviour, self-worth, and ultimately occupational identity.

2.9 The Tale of Two Cultures: Ballet and Contemporary Dance

In this section, I address the crossover between the more structured, stoic, traditional classical ballet style of dance, company, and culture against the more fluid, less structured, and more agentic choreographic process that epitomises the culture of contemporary dance companies. The principal reason for me having to address these different cultures is that larger elite ballet companies are now progressively including more contemporary pieces in their repertoire and the clash of cultures is an aspect that has emerged in my study. This has implications for ballet dancers' wellbeing and identity that I deal with in my Findings and Discussion, Recommendations & Conclusions chapters.

Classical ballet follows certain conventions which involve codified storytelling; female dancers wearing pointe shoes and tutus; music that has generally been purposely composed or adapted to the story; and generally, includes a 'character' dance (e.g.: Spanish, Hungarian, etc.). Contemporary dance, by contrast, is an umbrella term for a combination of modern dance forms that emerged in the early 1900s in the US. It had as its objective to project the prevailing norms and attitudes of the time and is flexible, where the imposition of classical ballet technique is not present. For example, contemporary pieces can be danced barefoot, be abstract, may have no music, or scenery on stage, etc. (Au, 2012).

Some consider contemporary or modern dance to be more natural and versatile in style allowing for greater diversity in body aesthetic, movement, and a genre that allows its interpreters to collaborate with choreographers exploring and generating ideas during the choreographic process based on their own interpretations (Dryburgh and Fortin, 2010; Langdon and Petracca, 2010; Markula, 2015; Leach and Stevens, 2020). From an organisational structure perspective, contemporary dance companies have a flat hierarchy more akin to a team, or troupe, with few or no ranks. The only differentiators

are generally tenure and experience which would be reflected in the salary scale (Equity Pay Rates, 2018/19).

Classical ballet and artistry, on the other hand, are substantially codified through the Benesh Movement Notation System (1956) and is also handed down from one generation of dancers to the next (Wulff, 2001). Classical choreography is, largely, fixed (Bland, 1981). Structurally, classical ballet companies are supremely hierarchical, both in terms of its management structure, but also have deep rank systems for the dancers to navigate (Wulff, 1998). This brings about an entrenched, military-style, power-distance relationship between the dancers and management, and between the different ranks of ballet dancers. Discipline, compliance, and subjective decision-making all contribute to a culture of docility amongst the dancers (Green, 2001). In more recent years, and in an attempt to appeal to a broader audience, classical ballet companies have included contemporary dance pieces that require classical ballet dancers to alternate between these two genres with complications for training, work schedules, rehearsal and performance patterns that have been shown to have potential implications for dancers' fitness, injuries, and career longevity (Shaw, et al., 2021). These aspects have relevance to the findings in my study.

2.10 Occupational Hazards

Within the broad context of my research questions, pain and injury per se were not the central focus of my study. However, from my participants' accounts, including their volunteered images and the number of references made to pain and injury, these were so significant that I felt that I was obliged to address this aspect of their lived experience. From an occupational perspective, research has shown that injury is considered to be part and parcel of the ballet dancers' experience, and this "culture of risk" is normalised and worn as a badge of honour (McEwen and Young, 2011, p. 154). Indeed, over half of dancers in studies carried out reported not seeking care for an injury and nearly two thirds of dancers were shown to resist reporting injury for fear of loss of role or job and stigma attached to it within the culture (Vassallo, et al., 2019; Bolling, et al., 2021). More than 80% of ballet dancers report having incurred one care-requiring injury per annum (Mattiussi, et al., 2021). For these reasons, I have included this section on pain and injury to provide a background in relation to the dancers' lived experience, and also to inform behaviour patterns relating to the ballet sub-culture and its approach to pain and injury.

In the past, ballet dancers were seen as purely performing artists whereas now, dancers' performative output results in a much more athletic style of dance (Allen and

Wyon, 2008). These demands on their bodies are more akin to that of a professional athlete given the development in ballet technique, expectations of management and audiences. A further complicating factor is the cross-over between classical ballet and modern dance in the repertoire of most elite ballet companies today that have differing demands on the dancers' bodies (Koutedakis and Jamurtas, 2004).

It is pivotal to contextualise and understand the mix of hierarchical structures, power distance relations, a highly competitive environment, the pursuit of perfection, and the short career time horizon that ballet dancers encounter in the ballet microcosm. This cocktail of parameters conspires to promote, and indeed enforce, complicity with management's pressure (McEwen and Young, 2011). All of these factors, and also adherence to Sabo's "pain principle" (2004, p. 64) where enduring pain and injury is said to build character, contribute to shaping the culture that forms ballet dancers' experiences and identity throughout their training and career. Pain is welcomed by ballet dancers because, pushing the body's boundaries in order to make progress, inevitably incurs pain (Pickard, 2015; McNarry, Allen-Collinson and Evans, 2020). Dancers, therefore, subscribe to a culture of pain being regarded as more important than pleasure and is the price to be paid to gain self-worth and secure social recognition (Sabo, 2004).

Pain and injury are complex issues within ballet and have been widely researched (e.g.: Tajet-Foxell and Rose, 1995; Wulff, 1998; Green, 1999; Mainwaring, Krasnow and Kerr, 2001; Turner and Wainwright, 2003; Wainwright and Turner, 2003, 2004; Aalten, 2005, 2007; Dryburgh and Fortin, 2010; Nordin-Bates, et al., 2011; Pickard, 2012, 2015; Harrison and Ruddock-Hudson, 2017; Vassallo, et al., 2019; Tarr and Thomas, 2020). Studies have shown that there are different viewpoints dependent on the stakeholder involved. From an employee's perspective, pain and injury have consequences on a daily basis for dancers and, as it has been widely shown, they risk injury with career limiting implications throughout their active dancing years (Vassallo, et al., 2019).

Given that pain is ever-present in a dancer's daily routine and injuries are not always defined congruently by dancers and staff, it is important to better understand how these are being interpreted (Bolling, et al., 2021). Firstly, dancers tend to underreport injury, particularly if they are still able to perform to a large extent (Bolling, et al., 2021). Also, both dancers and staff agree that there is a *grey area* relating to injury. They agree that injuries are present while it is still possible to dance, albeit below par. This leaves the definition of injury blurred (Bolling, et al., 2021). Even on a comparative basis, the standard adopted for the industry by the IADMS (International Association for Dance Medicine & Science), is to define injury as an occurrence associated with time-loss where the dancer is unable to fully perform (Mattiussi, et al., 2021). These definitions of injury are very blunt tools and have resulted in more-minor injuries not being detected by the

reporting systems. This underreporting of injuries, in the early stages of their development, are considered to be a contributing factor to the resultant high-incident rate as they escalate into time-loss events (Bolling, et al., 2021; Mattiussi, et al., 2021).

The sources of injury have been quantitatively investigated in different studies by Mattiussi, et al., (2021) within the context of The Royal Ballet where a large number of respondents (n = 123) was available. This was a longitudinal study carried out between 2015-2020 and uniquely provides multi-seasonal datapoints. In the tables below I address their findings relating to injury source from a mechanism perspective as well as activity situations. These findings need to be addressed cautiously, particularly from a reporting perspective. They have highlighted the limitation that the lack of injury reporting, prevalent in the industry, limits the scope of investigation into the origins of primary sources (Bolling, et al., 2021). The data below presents a summary of key issues from the Mattiussi, et al., (2021) study:

Table 6 - Injury Profile of Ballet Dancers at the Royal Ballet

Injury profile of Ballet Dancers at Royal Ballet	**Mild**	**Moderate**	**Severe**
Time loss	1-7 days	8-28 days	> 28 days
Injury severity	40%	25%	35%

Source: Mattiussi, et al., 2021.

Table 7 - Mechanism and Activity Causes of Injury

Mechanism	**Attention**	**Time-loss**
Jumping/Landing	25%	32%
Pointe (F)/ Lifting (M)	14%	12%
Others (5 groups of injuries)	35%	33%
Not classified	26%	23%
Activity	**Attention**	**Time-loss**
Rehearsals	48%	44%
Performances	20%	19%
Class	16%	16%
Other activities	9%	14%
Not classified	7%	7%

Source: Mattiussi, et al., 2021.

Approximately a quarter of all injuries that required medical attention and or time-loss (time off = not dancing) were unclassified as to the cause or mechanism (Mattiussi, et al., 2021). By the authors' own account, injuries that did not result in medical attention

and/or time loss are not included in the study. By implication, this could amount to a large body of injuries that have gone unreported in this research. However, there is valuable information to be gleaned that is relevant to my study. Firstly, 35% of all recorded injuries resulted in relatively long term (i.e.: >28 days) time off. This data would have been more helpful if it had addressed the ultra-longer-term injuries that do occur where dancers are taking a year, or more, to recover. The implication for these very long-term absences is that they can have direct impact on the dancers' self-perception, well-being, and career continuance (Wainwright, Williams and Turner, 2005).

The largest number of injuries sustained by dancers in the report is brought about by jumping and landing (25% requiring attention, 32% of all injuries resulting in time off). Approximately 40% of all reported injuries involved jumping, landing, pointe work (females) and lifting (males). Five other groups make up the remaining 35% of reported injuries. From a record-keeping perspective and cultural practice, it is notable that around 25% of all injuries lacked key information relating to how the injury occurred. From an activity perspective, rehearsals accounted for nearly 50%, whilst performances resulted in about 20% of all injuries reported.

Of the 849 injuries addressed in the report, 56% were attributed to females and 44% to male dancers (Mattiussi, et al., 2021, p. 19). Over the five-year period (2015-2020) relating to 123 participants with 849 reported injuries, each dancer would be injured approximately 7 times over that timeframe [849/123]. Not much appears to have changed over the years. A dancer was found to be exposed to an 80% chance of sustaining an injury in each working year in the beginning of the 21st century (Laws, 2005). However, this is not a new occurrence. As far back as 1975, classical ballet ranked at the top of a study, exploring 61 sports, for physical and mental stress (Nicholas, 1975), and injury was cited as the primary reason for early departure from the occupation (Hamilton, et al., 1997). This, therefore, explains the continuing significant focus of research on ballet injuries. Ballet has, more recently, been equated with an intermittent high-intensity activity patterns (e.g.: tennis; basketball) with the risk of cooling down in-between activities that could result in stress injuries (Shaw, et al., 2021).

Ballet is known for the high number of injuries sustained, the dancers' total reliance on their bodies to dance, and how the threat, and potential experience of serious injury can affect a dancer's occupational identity. Yet professional ballet remains generally perceived to *not* be a 'high risk' occupation. This could be attributed to a combination of factors including socialisation, cultural valorisation, the normalisation of pain, injury and sacrifice. It is further characterised by stoicism in the context of an ephemeral, highly competitive career, where perfectionistic tendencies abound

(McEwen and Young, 2011; Whiteside and Kelly, 2016; Nordin-Bates and Kuylser, 2021).

However, during the past 25 years, The Australian Ballet in Melbourne has been working on developing and deploying a cutting-edge programme to implement cultural and behavioural change. Initiated by its Board and implemented at all company levels, this programme led to the deployment of a multidisciplinary approach to dancers' wellbeing (Injury and Risk Management Handbook, 2020). The programme was recognised with an award for "Best Strategy for Health and Safety Management" at the 2008 WorkSafe Victoria Awards. However, examining the perceptions of pain, injury and transition-retirement of Australian dancers, Harrison and Ruddock-Hudson (2017) posited that the jury was still out with regards to the long-term effectiveness of the programme. Other companies have since adopted analogous programmes, but no evaluation data yet exists.

The above positioning, however, takes an organisational perspective whilst, for the purposes of my study, it is important to understand injury from the experiential perspective of the dancer. For the dancer, pain is generally a sign that they are working hard and that they are making progress (Wainwright and Turner, 2004; Loland, 2006; Pickard, 2012; Harrison and Rudock-Hudson, 2017). This definition of pain for the dancers is described as 'good' pain (McNarry, Allen-Collinson and Evans, 2020; Tarr and Thomas, 2020). How far this 'good' pain goes remains unclear from the Bolling, et al., (2021) and the Mattiussi, et al., (2021) investigations. Where the cut-off point is for the dancers remains blurred, but it does appear that a rather substantial amount of pain *can* and *is* endured on a daily basis in the normal course of their activities (Bolling, et al., 2021).

Markula (2015) notes that there is no discernible identity construction difference (how they live the injury) between male and female sports professionals and male and female ballet dancers. For example, in her study Markula cites that there was no response difference to running injury between the sexes (Allen-Collinson, 2005); female athletes took similar risks to males in rowing (Pike and Maguire, 2003) and the experiences of female and male athletes were not differentiated either (Young and White, 1995). Equally, ballet dancers (male and female) bore a similar degree of pain and persisted with dancing whilst injured (McEwen and Young, 2011). One underlying reason given was the competitive nature of the industry where missed opportunities may never be repeated (Markula, 2015). Neither males nor females appeared to have actively challenged the ballet culture (Markula, 2015).

Overuse of the body and overtraining are thus culturally embedded behaviours that have also been shown to account for exposure to injuries (Aalten, 2007; Pickard,

2012; Shaw, et al., 2021). Overuse was not only attributed to dancer behaviour in order to gain fitness, but it was also attributable to the clustering of workload related to performance schedules where the organisation puts excessive strain on individuals at certain points in the dancing calendar. Dancers related the occurrence of injuries to be more prevalent during these periods of overload (Bolling, et al., 2021).

The dancers, staff, and management are caught in a three-way collision involving the body being deployed in an unnatural way; a gruelling schedule of classes, rehearsals, and performances; and the ephemeral career duration. To perform at elite level, pain cannot be avoided. Pain is inherent in the process of deploying the body in an unnatural way. A professional dancer wants to dance as much as possible, as soon as possible. Management wants the same and the parties therefore collude in constructing demanding, sometimes, unsustainable work schedules. This results in more pain and elevates the risk of injury for the dancers. Sensibility and cautious behaviours are marginalised due to the very short nature of the career and the ephemeral peak period during which a dancer can deliver their best. Caution is thrown to the wind in many cases.

2.10.1 In-House Healthcare Units

Ballet companies in the 1980s relied largely on Pilates, followed by osteopathy and body conditioning for general maintenance and rehabilitation of their ballet dancers, with the support of a part-time visiting orthopaedic consultant. Commencing in 2002, a major shift occurred in the way elite ballet companies, and their vocational ballet schools in the UK, underpin their practices by the introduction of the in-house healthcare units providing dancer-centric support. The Jerwood Centre for the Prevention and Treatment of Dance Injuries in Birmingham was the first to open its facility in 2002, and that established the UK industry standard. They have a cross-disciplinary team of healthcare professionals encompassing ballet rehabilitation, nutritionists, physiotherapists, Pilates, Gyrotonic, sports medicine, and psychologists. The (Monica) Mason Healthcare Suite was inaugurated in 2013 at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden to support the Royal Ballet company dancers. Dance science is taking strides forward with the partnership between the Royal Ballet, London, and St Mary’s University in Twickenham, London, where strength conditioning is the focus of their research and collaboration.

The incorporation of sports medicine and appropriate cross-disciplinary healthcare management has taken decades to implement, but now appears to be advancing towards the delivery of better healthcare for ballet dancers. However, more needs to be done because injury rates continue to be high (Bolling, et al., 2021; Mattiussi, et al., 2021; Shaw, et al., 2021).

2.10.2 Dancer's Career Development (DCD)

Given the vulnerable and ephemeral nature of the ballet career, typically ending in the mid-late 30s, the industry recognises the importance of providing career transitioning support to ballet dancers in the UK (Roncaglia, 2007; Willard and Lavallee, 2016).

The Dancer's Career Development (DCD), formerly known as the 'Dancers' Resettlement Fund', is a UK registered charitable organisation founded in 1974. Its original purpose was to provide career re-training assistance to the dancers from the then five Arts Council funded dance companies. From the mid-1980s, and whilst the nature of DCD's support curriculum has changed over time, it has been expanded to provide longer-term career development, advice, and financial grants to all UK professional dancers from all genres of dance at any point in their career (DCD, 2021).

Injuries (traumatic, or chronic) at any point of the dancer's career, physical changes, a change in interest, or ultimately ageing, can trigger the end of a professional onstage career. The situation is further compounded by the narrow-focused vocational training that dancers receive, leaving them with little else in the form of academic education to support careers beyond ballet. Dancers may not have had the opportunity to pursue an academic, professional, or vocational education during their earlier formative years and therefore, in some cases, further education may be essential for career transition. DCD provides a range of services, including but not limited to workshops; one-to-one counselling; networking; upskilling; financial grants for career exploration, and retraining. In their various iterations over the past nearly 50 years, DCD have supported approximately 2500 dancers with their career transition (inc. all genres, e.g.: ballet, contemporary, jazz, hip hop) (DCD, 2021).

The DCD assistance, however, has limitations. Dancers are eligible for support normally after 8 years, of those 5 should have been spent working at a contributing company. This leaves the younger dancers, or those with portfolio careers, exposed if they become injured or career transition and cannot continue to dance. A further challenge is that ballet companies' contributions have been reduced in recent years (from 5 to 2.5%) resulting in the provision of services with limited depth being available from DCD. A third complication affecting DCD is that independent, or commercial dancers, receive benefits that are reliant on charitable donations and fundraising. This leaves DCD financially stretched and vulnerable.

The international nature of ballet dancers requiring career transitioning support is epitomised by the extent to which respective countries provide similar services to that

of DCD in the UK. DCD is a founding member of the 'International Organisation for the Transition of Professional Dancers' (IOTPD) which is made up of 10 sister organisations across North America; Continental Europe; and South Korea.

2.11 Conclusion

Professional ballet is work. It is an occupation that contributes to the UK economy both economically and culturally, extending its influence throughout the international realm. It attracts talent locally and internationally and provides work opportunities for many within and beyond the ballet company context itself. Given the level of skill and dedication required to perform to elite standards, the extensive time required to train and prepare the dancer for professional standards, and the innate short duration of the career and its inherent risk of injury, the remuneration levels for most dancers in an elite ballet company could be considered comparatively low. Terms and conditions of employment for professional ballet dancers in the UK are generally negotiated via the union and, as with mainstream employment, is subject to UK employment law.

Classical ballet is the most physically demanding of the performing arts. Being an aesthetic artform, it is significantly influenced by narrow ideals of beauty. Whilst it remains enshrined in centuries old European tradition, in recent times, it has become a more extreme form of work owing to the increased level of athleticism demanded to respond to choreographic demands and a mixed repertoire designed to attract new audiences. The nature of the task, the hyper competition for job opportunities, and the limitation of an ephemeral career timescale, renders ballet dancers susceptible to powerful management structures.

Within this sub-culture, the normalisation of pain and injury renders ballet dancers vulnerable to high levels of occupational injury with its concomitant impact upon their wellbeing and occupational identity. While steps are being taken to prevent and ameliorate the effects of injury, recent research has shown that injury levels amongst ballet dancers remains high (Bolling, et al., 2021; Mattiussi, et al., 2021; Shaw, et al., 2021). Ballet dancers' careers generally conclude in their mid-late 30s requiring of the industry to establish support mechanisms to facilitate career transitioning processes.

The relevance of the information in this chapter to my study is that the balletic sub-culture, training regimes, and the structure and style of management all have implications for the wellbeing of the ballet dancer's physical body as well as their mental health. These aspects have direct implications for the dancers' experience of their occupational identities.

3 Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter (Chapter 2) I contextualised ballet by including a succinct background to its development through the centuries, plotting its evolution from European royal court activity to remunerated full-time occupation. I provided a concise account of ballet in the UK, its development, and its contemporary positioning as an employment sector. I addressed vocational training that is central to the development of ballet's culture, and the employment conditions that professional ballet dancers encounter at UK elite ballet companies. I concluded Chapter 2 by summarising the key issues relating to the ballet context and its notion as work.

The starting point for my literature review was to address the extant OS literature that I considered relevant to an embodied occupation. However, the content of this chapter evolved inductively and iteratively, organised and adapted to incorporate theoretical aspects from the analysis as they were identified (e.g.: the subject body (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962)). The three notions of the body identified and discussed in this chapter were not the subject of a framework guiding the interpretation. Instead, it was organised and re-arranged to coincide with the sequencing of the data presentation. Thereafter, it was refined to focus more narrowly on those elements that were pertinent to my study and allow the reader to process the findings and analysis in the context of previous research.

My thesis, as explained in Chapter 1, is positioned within the field of Organisational Studies (OS) and addresses how professional ballet dancers experience their embodied occupational identities. My study also addresses how age(ing) influences the individual lived experience of being a ballet dancer. I position ballet dancers as remunerated full-time workers within the UK. To date, professional ballet has been an occupation underrepresented in OS studies. Few of the OS studies focused specifically on embodied occupations in terms of the narrower definition pertaining to my study (see Chapter 1, p. 14). At the commencement of my literature review, the studies that were relevant to my research but taking a discursive approach included Thornborrow and Brown (2009), Coupland (2015), and Courpasson and Monties (2017).

By contrast, ballet has been the backdrop of a number of studies in adjacent fields such as clinical sciences (e.g.: McCormack, et al., 2019), sports medicine (e.g.: Tajet-Foxell and Rose, 1995; Hamilton, 2008); dance medicine (e.g.: Simmel and Michael, 2013; Harrison and Ruddock-Hudson, 2017); psychology (e.g.: Vincent, 1989; Mainwaring, Krasnow and Kerr, 2001) and dance education (e.g.: Green,1999; Buckroyd, 2000; Pickard, 2015). A further aspect to note in respect of identity studies is

that research, taking ballet dancers as a subject in the field of dance research, have generally addressed the pre-professional training stage or puberty phase (e.g.: Pickard, 2015; Mitchell, Haase and Cumming, 2021), and the retirement and post-retirement phases (e.g.: Roncaglia, 2007; Willard and Lavallee, 2016). However, with the exception of three ethnographies that focused on the occupational culture of specific ballet companies (i.e.: Wulff, 1998; Aalten, 2004; Wainwright and Turner, 2003), there is a paucity of studies that investigate the lived experience of actively working ballet dancers.

I adopted a critical integrative stance to my literature review to explore fields adjacent to OS (Whittemore and Knafl, 2005) to develop a wider array of theoretical, methodological, and empirical studies that were not commonly represented in OS to inform my research. I adopted a “berrypicking” approach to my literature search (Bates, 1989, p. 196) where each relevant source provided scaffolding towards further appropriate literature. This method treats each relevant reference as the basis upon which to build new conceptions of a query in an iterative manner. The iterative stance of this ‘berrypicking’ model facilitated the review and re-assessment of the literature based upon concepts emanating from my data that precipitated the requirement for wider reading during, and after, analysis. This process culminated in me re-arranging the literature, organising it to highlight the three bodies (‘idealised’, ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’) that were core findings in my study. The themes were thus inducted from my data, as is usual in IPA (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), and informed the final structure of my literature review. In addition to facilitating wider exploration, this method of literature review informed my understanding of the embodied nature of identity more widely across research disciplines.

This chapter is structured comprising of introductory theory relating to occupational identity, followed by three main parts based upon the roles and functionality of the body in relation to its societal interpretation. The first main section below addresses the ‘idealised body’ that is predominantly envisioned by the organisation and serves to attract and motivate individuals to respond to its demands in order to gain access to the benefits of the occupation. The second main section addresses the ‘object-body’ on which the organisation/society acts in order to effect power, discipline, and surveillance. The final main section addresses the ‘subject-body’ where the living and feeling experiential dimensions of the body are addressed in relation to the balletic occupational identity. I conclude this chapter by postulating my rationale for adopting a phenomenological approach to exploring more deeply the individual lived experiences of my participants in order to elucidate those aspects of their occupational identity that can only be known to the individual. I also provide a rationale for my treatment of age

separately, and highlight its importance in relation to its role in the body and its influence on occupational identity.

3.2 Occupational Identity

Occupational identity relates centrally to my thesis and forms the basis of the discussion relating to the individuals' experience of the role of their body, particularly in occupations where the body is crafted for purpose (i.e.: ballet dancers). Occupational identity, including professional identity or career identity, can be conceived of as the conscious awareness of the individual as a worker of themselves (Skorikov and Vondraceck, 2011). In the context of this thesis, professional identity is understood as a specific form of occupational identity pertaining to work associated with a particular corpus of knowledge, training and a particular status (Atewologun, et. al., 2017).

Christiansen (1999) developed the concept of occupational identity wherein he posited the overlap between self-identity and what we do as work. As such, occupational identity represents to the individual a complex array of meaning-making through which the individual associates his or her aspirations, motivation and competencies with a role and is, consequently, the vehicle through which an individual conceptualises their sense of identity (Skorikov and Vondracek, 2007).

As with most human-science concepts, the definition of occupational identity can be elusive. Initially, the definition postulated by Kielhofner (2008) approach was to address occupational identity. However, it would appear that with a single occupational identity prevailing in mind: "a composite sense of who one is and wishes to become as an occupational being generated from one's history of occupational participation. One's volition, habituation, and experience as a lived body are all integrated into occupational identity" (Kielhofner, 2008, p. 106). Further research has elucidated that, in the complex work environment developing during the 21st Century, individuals could play various roles in the work environment. The could therefore have different occupational identities for each role (Caza, Moss and Vough, 2018). One of the outflows of this multiple-roles working environment is that the individual's authenticity may be impaired, thereby suppressing their ability to enact their true self (Hewlin, Dumas and Burnett, 2015).

By its very nature, occupational identities are collective identities to which people aspire, and through which individuals gain a group identity and status (Dickie, Cutchin and Humphry, 2006). In the process of acquiring access to collective identities, the individual identity can become subjugated to that collective identity, to the extent that individuals have been known to self-stereotype themselves to that social group identity (Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann, 2006). Willingness to self-

sacrifice has been shown to be related to the individual's identification with the group to the extent that they perceive the members to be as close as 'family' (Swann, et al., 2014).

A distinction needs to be drawn between identities that relate to common bonds and those that are based on common identity. Individual identities are those that are premised upon common bonds, whilst occupational identity is premised upon association through a common identity (Brewer and Gardner, 1996). Identity is contingent upon, and integral to, the environment in which it is performed (Unruh, 2004). Any change in individual circumstances, particularly health or family priorities, can have a radical impact on the individual's ability to identify with the occupational identity (Haynes, 2012a; Hennekam, et al., 2019). Separation from one's occupational identity can precipitate a crisis within the individual (Maitlis, 2022). An occupational identity, with which an individual strongly identifies, is enduring and will precipitate action in order to maintain that identity (Kielhofner, et al., 2002). Indeed, disruptive events in an individual's life are best recovered from, and a bridge is provided primarily by identification with one's occupational identity (Vrkljan and Miller Polgar, 2001; Maitlis, 2009). Having a positive and strong relationship with one's self-chosen occupational identity is an important factor in an individual's psychological well-being (Skorikov and Vondracheck, 2011; Caza, Moss and Vough, 2018).

Individuals do not always align their personal identity with their collective identity which has implications for both cognitive and emotive dissonance. The individual thus tries to narrow the incongruence between these two identity positions but, where this is not possible, and depending upon the social and economic benefits that could be at stake, individuals may deploy coping mechanisms to accommodate the dissonance between these differing identities (Caza, Moss and Vough, 2018). This misalignment can have implications for cooperation and collaborative participation in teams. Where affirmation of the individual's identity is not validated by the team, long-term coherence with group identity could suffer and may fracture (Milton, 2009).

3.2.1 Aspirational Identity

A closely related concept to occupational identity is the notion of aspirational identity. An aspirational identity is "a story-type or template in which an individual construes him or herself as one who is (i) earnestly desirous of being a particular kind of person and (ii) self-consciously and consistently in pursuit of this objective" (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009, p. 370). Aspirational identities are deployed by organisations as a means of power through which they normalise a prototypical identity, through their dogma, that then becomes an aspirational pursuit upon which the organisation insists

individuals must conform in order to be accepted into the occupation (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009). Characteristic of this aspirational identity is its power to motivate the individual to become a specific kind of person (Humphreys and Brown, 2002). Management, rather than targeting employees' behaviours directly focuses on their hopes, aspirations, and fears (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). It is through the exploitation of these hopes, aspirations and fears that the organisation exercises control over the individual (Costas and Grey, 2014; Jammaers and Zanoni, 2021).

Aspirational identities are subjectively conceived of, with which individuals engage through the medium of narratives, where they form, repair, maintain, strengthen, and revise their identities in order to construct an ongoing sense of "coherence and distinctiveness" (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165). Organisations focus the individual on the aspirational narrative relevant to themselves, ensuring that alternative narratives are crowded out (Obodaru, 2012). This is done to ensure that attention and commitment are not diluted by the presence of alternative selves. This organisational intervention has a direct impact on the individual's identity construction, particularly in relation to their occupational identity (Obodaru, 2012).

Paratroopers, an extreme embodied occupation, epitomised how disciplined work encouraged candidates to consider themselves aspirant and engaged in discursive practices to pursue the occupation which they considered to be very desirable (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009). The paratroopers' identities were shown to be elusive, resulting in ongoing identity work in the pursuit of attaining those high ideals in order for them to claim that occupational identity (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009). These elusive occupational identities enable the organisation to influence employees to identify themselves by specific attributes that they believe define the organisation with which they are associated and, in turn, strengthen their individual identity (Dutton, et al.,1994).

Organisations deploy a cloak of secrecy surrounding how they shape and control the individual's behaviours leading to identity construction that enables the organisation to dictate how occupations define "who they are" (Costas and Grey, 2014, p. 1424). It is thus the ability of the organisation to control the narrative of aspirational identity that empowers them to exercise control over that aspiration (Jammaers and Zanoni, 2021). A complication for the organisation is that the individual may engage with romanticising or fantasizing an identity relating to the occupation that may be in contradiction to the corporate ideals and objectives (DiBenigno, 2022). This could be further complicated by the individual experiencing work/identity dissonance, and where adaptation work is required by the individual to restore balance (Pratt, Rockman and Kaufmann (2006). It is this misalignment that can prevail, for example, after the ballet student is engaged in vocational ballet school that will require of the organisation to exert pressure in order to

'normalise' their occupational identity aligned to the ballet craft (Pickard, 2012). This reveals the complex nature of occupational identity construction and maintenance.

3.2.2 Embodied Occupational Identity

Occupational identity in itself is a large body of study of which embodied occupational identity is a subset. This too is a large body of study that requires further narrowing in the context of my study. For the purposes of my thesis my focus is specifically on ballet as an embodied occupation. The term embodied occupation can have various meanings depending upon the field of study, and the author. For example, Markula (2015) comments that Turner and Wainwright (2003) identified that ballet created a specific "embodied identity" (p. 847) that accepted injuries as part of the occupation. Within this same identity, Markula (2015) defined what the dancer's body was like (e.g.: emaciated, skinny, and always in pain). In Chapter 1, I defined 'embodied occupation' in respect of my study to be: *an occupation where industry-specific training results in the individual's body being crafted for purpose and deployed at the centre of their task*.

OS has traditionally followed the Cartesian mind/body dichotomy, privileging the mind, that was deemed to define humans as social beings (Shilling, 2012). Indeed, the body has been an "absent presence" (Shilling, 2012, p. 12) because the body's perceived biologically oriented function is seen to fall outside the notion of culture (Howson, 2013 where social discourse is the medium for identity construction; examining the intellectual and discursive elements informing the individual's interaction with the cultural environment (Knights and Clarke, 2017; Brown, 2019; Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2021). Discourses surrounding identity remained disparate (e.g.: discursive, symbolic, dramaturgical, and psychoanalytic) with little scope for homogenisation (Corlett, et al., 2017). Whilst the 'absence presence' of the body in OS was historically highlighted by Acker (1990) few studies have tended to take cognisance of the body in empirical identity studies (e.g.: Tretheway, 1999; Riach and Cutcher, 2014; Brown and Coupland, 2015; Coupland, 2015). With the shift during the knowledge revolution towards a greater concentration of knowledge work, the body had become more concealed since it was less involved in the physical completion of tasks in mainstream occupations (Leder, 1990).

In recent times, the incorporation of the material body into identity studies has gained further momentum (Corlett, et al., 2017; Knights and Clarke, 2017; Courpasson and Monties, 2017, Brown, 2020). Studies relating to 'dirty work' (Simpson and Simpson, 2018 have highlighted how work manifests physically on the body by leaving 'stains' that

mark the individual in relation to that work (e.g.: offal under a butcher's nails). These studies make the case that taking a socially constructed discursive approach cannot fully apprehend the material body in the process (Simpson and Simpson, 2018). Lawrence, et al. (2022) confirms the shift towards a more embodied approach in OS, recognising the material body as a key protagonist in organising at work and hence occupational identity construction. In particular, there is now an emergent stream of study that seeks to address new forms of organisational control, as well as the scope for individual agency to resist and transcend those controls (Johansson, et al., 2017; Courpasson and Monties, 2017; van Amsterdam and van Eck, 2019; Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2021). My study embraces this notion that the body is integral to identity, and I pursue those theories and empirical works that elucidate on the influence of the body in identity construction.

Central to incorporating the body into the notion of its active influence on identity construction is the acceptance of the mind and body as a unified entity and the rejection of the Cartesian mind/body dualism in favour of a non-reductive ontology (Budgeon, 2003). The material body, Budgeon (2003) argues, is inextricably entwined with the individual's self-identity and that subjectivity is an element in the process of the individual negotiating their place in the world (Allen-Collinson and Hockey, 2007). A conceptual framework that seeks to overcome the limitations of structure/agency and mind/body divide is that devised by Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990). His Theory of Practice framework inculcates the social world into the body and his concept of the habitus provides for a more agentic theorization of embodiment to that of Foucault's (McNay, 1999). Bourdieu places the body at the nexus between the individual and society and positions his framework, theoretically, betwixt structuralism and existential phenomenology incorporating the key concepts of field, habitus, and capital (Wolkowitz, 2006). Consequently, Bourdieu's framework has become popular in studies addressing workplace groupings such as occupations, diversity, or social class (Evans, Whiting and Mackenzie Davey, 2020). Bourdieu's Theory of Practice (1977; 1990) is broadly deployed in relation to studies that focus on social structure where it crafts a relationship between discrete social/occupational fields and the habitus (or embodied dispositions) which I discuss later.

I now explain the elements of the Bourdieusian framework which provides a convenient mechanism through which to understand the interrelationship between a single 'field' or occupation, and the individual.

'Field' refers to social arenas (e.g.: work, home life, hobbies, sports) represented by groups of individuals whose bodies epitomise the characteristics (or brand) of the organisation (van Amsterdam, Claringbould and Knoppers, 2017). These fields construct

their own hierarchy, rules, and culture where participants compete for power and prestige (Carter and Spence, 2020). A cornerstone of the Bourdieusian framework is the notion of social class and status, where individuals are assigned a hierarchical position within the field. These mechanisms result in a structured governance that binds the participants together (Carter and Spence, 2020).

'Habitus' is the accumulation of historical interaction by the individual in society and through which capital (e.g.: social, economic, cultural skills and competencies) is sedimented into the body (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Holroyd, 2002). Habitus represents the accumulation of an individual's history where it is deepened beyond the basics of classification (e.g.: social class) (Riach and Cutcher, 2014; Carter and Spence, 2020). The habitus is seen as a space beyond the will of the individual and operates in a non-conscious way "below the level of consciousness and language" (Crossley, 2001, p. 83). Through his concept of the habitus, Bourdieu re-envisions the self, positioning the body as the interface between society and the individual where the habitus is the nexus that mediates the relationship (Wolkowitz, 2006). For the individual, the social is embedded into the body via the habitus, but the locus of agency remains within society (Wolkowitz, 2006; Evans, Whiting and Mackenzie Davey, 2020). The individual thus develops a disposition that orients them towards an interrelationship with society motivated by the likely presence of calling and/or passion for the occupation (Wacquant, 1995; Wainwright and Turner, 2004; Satama, 2015). I deal with calling and passion below (see p. 58).

For completeness, Bourdieu (1998) describes organisational cultural communications and messaging as 'Doxa', and the concept of 'Illusio' addresses the process through which individuals are invested in that occupation. 'Hexis' relates to the performative aspect of an individual's exchange within society from a bodily context (e.g.: gait, movement, posture). Full definitions of these Bourdieusian terms are available in the appended Glossary (see p. 270).

This Bourdieusian framework will be used, to some extent, to address the role of the aspirational or idealised body within the context of identity construction in the section below.

3.2.3 The Idealised Body

The aspirational or idealised body derives from the desire to emulate iconic symmetrical beauty enshrined in Western culture (Bordo, 1993). In the organisational context, looking the part and meeting organisational aspirational objectives for the body, individuals are driven to respond to those demands and constantly strive to overcome bodily dissatisfaction where they perceive themselves not to measure up to expectations

(Trethewey, 1999; Hancock and Tyler, 2000; Warhurst, et al., 2000; Frew and McGillivray, 2005; Riach and Cutcher, 2014; Pouthier and Sondak, 2021).

The image of one's body is inextricably linked to occupational identity (Trethewey, 1999; Wainwright, Williams and Turner, 2006; Pickard, 2013; Riach and Cutcher, 2014, van Amsterdam and van Eck, 2019). This is particularly so in cultures where physicality is important in terms of prowess and aesthetics (Phoenix, Faulkner and Sparkes, 2005). The "idealised body" (Foster, 1997, p. 237) is a visualised, romanticised, ideal that serves to attract the individual to a particular occupation and to comply with organisational demands ensconced in the organisation's belief system and communicative *doxa* (Carter and Spence, 2020). The process of embracing the symbolic value of the body, in particular "looking the part", leads the individual to commit to the demands of the organisation (Pouthier and Sondak, 2021, p. 387). It is the *illusio* of the individual believing and committing to these demands and thereby willing to incur sacrifices towards achieving that aspirational identity (Carter and Spence, 2020).

The idealised body, in the hands of management, can be used and abused to deliver the aims and objectives of the organisation (Ritenburg, 2010; Jammaers and Zanoni, 2021). In these instances, the organisations exert power and control based on the individual's desire to achieve acceptance into the occupation (Alvesson and Karreman, 2007). However, it is the individual that exercises discipline over themselves in order to meet those standards and demands, not society/the organisation (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009). Ballet, as with other body-centric occupation such as boxing, footballers, and rugby players, provides a fitting opportunity to investigate the extent to which the nexus of body and identity are interrelated with the concept of achieving the objectives of the aspirational body (Wacquant, 1995; McGillivray, Fern and McIntosh, 2005; Thornborrow and Brown, 2009; Alexias and Dimitropoulou, 2011; Coupland, 2015; Courpasson and Monties, 2017; Rodrigues, et al., 2020).

In a similar vein to Thornborrow and Brown's (2009) paratroopers, and Coupland's (2015) rugby players, Wacquant (1995) summons the aspirational identity or *illusio* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), where his boxers pursue an idealised embodied identity that attracts them to comply with organisational demands ensconced in the organisation's belief system or *doxa*. *Illusio* is the buy-in that an individual is willing to commit to and incur sacrifices towards achieving that aspirational identity (Carter and Spence, 2020).

Seeking to understand why ballet dancers accept hunger, pain, and injuries to the detriment of the very instrument (their bodies) that they need to deploy in their craft, Aalten (2005) observed that this habitual behaviour was inculcated into their routines emanating from the ballet sub-culture. This, she explains, resonates with Foster (1997,

p. 237) "two bodies" concept where ballet dancers live and work *on* and *with* their tangible bodies, striving to achieve the "aesthetically ideal body" (Aalten, 2005, p. 60) propagated by the ballet sub-culture. The dancers are thereby able to put distance between themselves and the body as a separate instrument (the object-body) to be managed (Alexias and Dimitropoulou, 2011). The body is thus perceived as a tool in the pursuit of their task (Green, 1999; 2001).

"*My figure sealed my fate*" (Kirkland, 1988, p. 56).

The pursuit of the idealised body is a recurring theme that pervades a range of industries. The ideal image of the individual is social-context dependent and may mutate over time (Grogan, 1999). Recruitment and employment are contingent upon having the desired body aesthetic in industries such as: air cabin crew (Tyler and Abbott, 1998); 'businesswomen' (Trethewey, 1999); 'city workers' (Waring and Waring, 2009); accountants (Haynes, 2012b); hedge fund traders (Riach and Cutcher, 2014); executive search consultants (Meriläinen, Tienari and Valtonen, 2015); professional sports people (van Amsterdam, Claringbould and Knoppers, 2017) and ballet dancers (Pickard, 2012; 2013; 2015).

Bodily aesthetic can be specifically linked to the individual's task but even in industries where individuals are engaged in a disembodied cognitive-centric task (e.g.: hedge fund traders), the socially constructed bodily aesthetic can play a deterministic role in employment continuance (Riach and Cutcher, 2014). The 'City of London' culture (organisational habitus), for example, has little tolerance for the natural display of ageing (e.g.: grey hair; wrinkles; excess weight; loss of deportment) (Riach and Cutcher, 2014). Socially, the fit body is shorthand for the perception of efficiency and competence (Johansson, Tienary and Valtonen, 2017).

In a further OS study, investigating the impact of organisational recruitment, training, and management of female flight attendants, Tyler and Abbott (1998) made a significant contribution to the study of having and maintaining the 'right' aesthetic body as a defining characteristic for employment that is relevant to my study. As with airline cabin crew, ballet dancers have to have the 'right' aesthetic not only as an individual, but as an extension of the organisation's image itself (Nickson, et al., 2001; Witz, Warhurst and Nickson, 2003; Harvey, Vachhani and Williams, 2014). Recruitment and management is thus focused on the physical appearance of the individual in order to synchronise their aesthetic with the organisational brand image. Tyler and Abbott (1998)

based their study within a Foucauldian framework (1977) of surveillance, discipline, and control of the body by the organisation.

Slenderness was posited as a metaphor for efficiency and effectiveness (Tyler and Abbott, 1998). The premise of control was that if the female flight attendant's body did not comply with organisational specifications, then they were perceived as being *deficient* and subject to disciplinary control. This aligns with other OS where control over the body and its physical appearance is similarly interpreted by the organisation (e.g.: Trethewey, 1999; Warhurst and Nickson, 2007; Johansson, Tienary and Valtonen, 2017).

This, and other forms of surveillance and control observed in the ballet world (e.g.: Green, 1999; Dryburgh and Fortin, 2010; Tarr and Thomas, 2020), and other occupations more commonly addressed in OS (e.g.: Trethewey, 1999; Haynes, 2012b: Riach and Cutcher, 2014; Merilainen, Tienary and Valtonen, 2015; Johansson, Tienari and Valtonen, 2017), are not limited to management intervention but indeed extend to lateral and self-observation and self-regulation (Webb, McCaughtry and Doune, 2004; Levay, 2014; van Amsterdam and van Eck, 2019). The maintenance therefore of the aesthetic aspect of the body comprises the use of unremunerated personal time and resources although implicitly and explicitly required as an intrinsic part of the job. The overlap between ballet (Green, 1999, 2001, 2002; and Dryburgh and Fortin, 2010) on the one hand, and OS studies (Tyler and Abbott,1998, Trethewey, 1999) on the other is that their studies were directed towards understanding the impact of discipline, control, and surveillance within the recruitment, training, and employment contexts of their respective environments. They all concluded that, through the deployment of these management techniques, the body is rendered 'docile' (Foucault, 1977, p. 135). This is a profound position relative to the body and in relation to identity construction because, effectively, the body is rendered merely a recipient of organisational discipline and punishment, and the individual has no agency over the body (Foucault, 1977).

This ideal body therefore has social implications not only for the individual but also for the organisational and social actors. The ideal image is thus culturally acquired and influences self-perception as one's body more closely resembled the perceived ideal (Price and Pettijohn, 2006). In these contexts, and particularly within the ballet milieu, organisational surveillance and power coerce the worker into complying with the idealised body (Riach and Cutcher, 2014; Whiteside and Kelly, 2016; Johansson, Tienary and Valtonen, 2017; Zeller, 2017).

'Physical capital', a particular form of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is present and related to the idealised body discussed above (Tulle, 2015). It is of specific interest to my study because it relates to the accumulation of those attributes that enable the

individual to function in a scenario where the body is central to the task. Ballet dancers are required to develop specific skills from a young age, and over decades, in order to acquit themselves of their role. A particularity of physical capital is that it varies according to individual innate characteristics including (e.g.: height, body shape, physical competencies for a specific task) (Shilling, 1991). However, physical capital can be developed further but it is dependent upon the pre-existence of these innate capabilities (Holroyd, 2002).

The habitus is instrumental in the individual accumulating capital in the body and for the conversion of that capital from one form to another (e.g.: physical capital to economic capital) (Holroyd, 2002). Physical capital is accumulated through a circular process initiated by society, mediated by the habitus, and embedded through training and physical effort by the individual into the body (Wacquant, 1995). This physical capital, in turn, is exchanged with society/the organisation (field) and culminates in the acquisition of status and position (McGillivray, Fern and McIntosh, 2005). The individual, in their "whole existence" (i.e.: the body as a single unit rather than a split mind/body entity) (Wacquant, 1995, p. 66), is complicit in the process of accumulating this capital, and it is not society alone that inscribes this capital on (or disciplining) the body (Shilling, 2003). By implication, while the initiative may vest with society/the organisation, it is the individual who is complicit in the self-modification and disciplining of the body (Coupland, 2015). While the habitus is central to Bourdieu's conceptual framework, it has been critiqued for being under-theorised and for lacking in explanation as to precisely how it is acquired (Silva, 2016). Indeed, the habitus remains an ambiguous concept and void of a consistent definition even within the works of Bourdieu (Crossley, 2013). Nonetheless, Bourdieu's conceptual framework is a useful mechanism that seeks to explain the interactional relationship between the integrated individual (integrated mind/body unity) and society.

For the idealised body, in the context of an embodied occupation, to function effectively it needs to accumulate those skills and competencies that enable the body to respond to the demands of the occupation. For example, the boxer must be able to embody the specific skills required to enable them to survive and thrive in a highly reactionary environment where automated skills can be drawn upon at will in order to compete in the fight (Wacquant, 1995). These responses need to come 'naturally' for them to be effective (Bourdieu, 1984). The boxing skills therefore are memorised and embodied, or sedimented, within the individual to enable them to operate non-consciously (Wacquant, 1995). Crossley (2001) confirms this interpretation of Bourdieu's work and points to the fact that it is at the essence of the habitus, which in itself is the accumulation of historical interaction by the individual in society, which has accumulated

spatially through experience and over time as capital in the body (Riach and Cutcher, 2014). For ballet dancers to be effective they need to move beyond the mere prioritization of the ideal body shape and inculcate those embodied skills and practices commensurate with a "moving, dancing artform" (Zeller, 2017, p. 100).

3.2.4 The Greedy Occupation

In the ballet world, one the most well-known Artistic Directors of all times was George Balanchine. He was renowned for his excessive demands made on ballet dancers (Kirkland, 1988). In particular, he was pernicious to a fault with regard to the slenderness he required of the female dancers (Ritenburg, 2010). His drive and desire for perfection in his ballets attracted a wide variety of aspirational and accomplished dancers to New York City Ballet. The dancers' passion and drive to be part of his company and to excel at his iconic ballets left them vulnerable to these excessive organisational demands (Ritenburg, 2010). The organisational desire for notoriety and success was not restricted to the New York City Ballet. Indeed, in The Netherlands, pursuing an ethnographic research project inspired by the words of Alicia Markova (2000) where she described her success in ballet as having been akin to having lived the life of a nun, Aalten (2005) sought to understand the nature of the ballet occupation and set about conducting biographical interviews and collecting life stories across a number of Dutch ballet companies (1992-2000). A characteristic of Aalten's study was that it was carried out over a period of eight years, and on occasion, she was able to interview the same individual at different time intervals. On the macro level, Aalten's participants reported experiencing what they described as the *greed* of the organisations and the extent of the demands and effort required to function fully within them (Coser,1974). These *greedy* organisations demand exclusivity and engross the individual fully consuming all of the available time and energy – in effect approaching the concept of the ideal worker (Bailyn, 2006). The dancer submits to this total control in exchange for inclusion and the benefits associated with what they perceive as a privileged group (Coser,1974; Alvesson and Karreman, 2007). Royal, or elite, patronage through the occupation for example, act both as reinforcement of that sense of belonging to something *special* (Wulff, 1998), and as a symbolic boundary that separates the in-group from the out-group (Tajfel and Turner, 1985). This sense of belonging and engagement with the *special group,* "a breed apart", has a pervasive influence on them and impacts on the individual ballet dancer's identity (Pickard, 2015, p. 6).

In the process of analysing each individual account separately, Aalten (2005) was able to discover not only the similarities but the individual nuances of each case. Aalten's study found that a participant's story had changed significantly over time making the case

for longitudinal studies in the realm of identity. The participant of reference, whilst dancing, was always very critical of the time and effort demanded by the occupation and management's control. However, she embraced the 'specialness' narrative espoused by the organisation at the time, on the understanding that she was capable of physical feats that are not within the gift of the average individual and that the organisation provided the context in which to give effect to her self-expression (Khudaverdian, 2006).

This same participant was interviewed a number of years later (during the same study) after her retirement from the stage and then self-assessed quite differently. The participant observed that, as a result of the dependency upon ballet management, dancers were infantilised and constrained to a life of subservience. Ballet dancers worked and socialised within the close confines of the ballet company where all activities were regulated and programmed by management. This control had an impact on the dancers' self-perception and informed their identity at the time (Alvesson and Karreman, 2007). The dancers perceived themselves as forming part of a select group with deep-rooted cultural traditions handed down from prior generations and their occupational identity pervaded the self (Aalten, 2005; Wulff, 2008). Post-retirement, the participant ascribed her perception of the dancer's 'specialness' to management's ways of disguising discourses of power and control (Aalten, 2005).

Aalten's life stories research resonates with my study in the sense that she was able to explore deeper meaning relating to each individual participant and also the nuances that characterised each individual's own account, making the case for idiographic enquiry. These studies depict scenarios where greedy organisations exist and thrive on individuals' aspirational desires driven by a sense of calling and passion (Wacquant, 1995; Wainwright and Turner, 2004; Aalten, 2005).

3.2.5 Calling, Passion, and Sacrifice

Passion, emanating from the concept of suffering (*passio*) in Latin (Linstead and Brewis, 2007), highlights the simultaneous existence of both the bright side, and enjoyment, alongside the dark side, representing pain and vulnerability (Satama, 2015). Calling and passion are known to be used interchangeably and they both conceptually motivate the individual to perform tasks, often without commensurate reward but instead for the benefit of the organisation or society (Wrzesniewski, 2012). Both are derived primarily from the individual's disposition towards certain self-defining, preferred, activities and through which it becomes a feature of an individual's identity (Vallerand, et al., 2003).

A sizeable body of earlier research focused on the positive aspects of calling where individuals undertaking work in line with it are inclined to derive happiness, and are more dedicated, and engaged with their craft (Wrzesniewski, et al.,1997; Wrzesniewski, 2003; Hall and Chandler, 2005). Ballet is able to be more than a conduit for bodily expression, and capable of creating mystique and illusion that is transformative for both the dancer and the audience (Benn and Walters, 2001).

More recent studies, however, view calling to be more comprised of a "double-edge sword" where the individual is at risk of being caught simultaneously between their passion for their craft and finding themselves exposed to exploitation by the organisation (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009, p. 39). A shift in focus of contemporary thinking has tended to address the darker side of calling and passion where the result of excessive personal investment into the occupation can lead to obsessive behaviour, workaholism and burnout (Duffy, et al., 2016; Schabram and Maitlis, 2017).

Where the concept of passion relates to occupational identity is that it can have shades ranging from the positive, or harmonious implications for the individual, through various contours of less positive, ambivalent or mildly adverse experiences, to those behaviours that may be obsessive and addictive (Bonneville-Roussy, Lavigne, and Vallerand, 2011). The obsessive and addictive behaviours have a detrimental effect on the individual (Vallerand, 2008) and it is these aspects of passion that renders the individual vulnerable to suffering, exploitation, and abuse (Satama, 2015). Passion and calling, therefore, have to be addressed in terms of their dual aspect seen from both the perspective of the individual, and the influence of the organisation (Bonneville-Roussy, Lavigne, and Vallerand, 2011).

The degree of commitment and sacrifice that boxers make, for example, where they willingly and obediently put their bodies on the line, deploying them as the medium or instrument through which they conduct their craft, equates to a *calling* (Wacquant, 1995). Over time, this behaviour comes to possess the boxer who masterly perpetuates those behaviours, willingly pursuing this risky occupation because he is in the social field and the social field is within him (Wacquant, 1995). Skipping training sessions results in them experiencing withdrawal symptoms that could be compared to the experience encountered by an addict grappling with an addiction (Wacquant, 1995). Despite the presence of long-term injuries and pain, this addiction to the behaviour and practice of boxing prevents them from discontinuing the craft. The boxer's compulsion to fight is the outcome of the symbiotic social interaction between his crafted-for-purpose body and the boxing field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Where passion becomes so internalised to the point that it gives rise to the individual adopting actions and values so

aligned with the occupation, it becomes obsessive passion that ultimately then apprehends their identity (Vallerand, 2008).

A parallel with this addictive behaviour could be drawn with that observed of the ballet dancers' perceptions in Wainwright, Williams and Turner (2005) ethnographic work at the Royal Ballet, London. They observed that such was their participants' *calling* (passion) to train, rehearse, and dance, that they were addicted to their habitual training and the feeling and sensations of their sweaty, lived bodies despite regularly enduring pain and injuries. It is the degree of commitment and perseverance that ballet dancers exhibit that would give rise to the notion of ballet being a calling. Ballet dancers engage in vocational training and ongoing physical and artistic development for almost a decade before they engage in professional employment, driven by their passion for the craft (Wainwright and Turner, 2006; Rodrigues, et al., 2020). Indeed, professional dancers were amazed that they were paid for doing something they loved: "ballet is not just something that you *do*: in a very deep sense, it is who you *are*" (Wainwright and Williams, 2005, p. 56; Beech and Broad, 2020). Professionals defining themselves in terms of their occupation have been observed elsewhere. However, there were instances of "work-identity integrity violations" (Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann, p.: 253) that required interventions in order to restore role-identity integrity in their empirical study of medical residents.

Drawing a parallel between ballet dancers and boxers Wacquant (1995, p. 66) observes that "like a dancer, a boxer '*is'* his body and is totally identified with it". Such is the physicality and the embodiment of these occupations, that their crafted-for-purpose bodies ultimately become their identities (Wainwright and Turner, 2004). This passionate disposition and total commitment to the occupation gives rise to a state of vulnerability for the dancer (Satama, 2015). The paradox, however, is that instead of greater passion for the occupation resulting in greater self-satisfaction and identity security, it results in greater vulnerability. In other words, the greater the investment and commitment to the calling/passion, the greater the exposure to potential exploitation by the organisation, the greater the degree of vulnerability for the individual (Gherardi, Nicolini and Strati, 2007).

In a different but relevant work setting where older workers were specifically recruited to serve mature clientele, this dissonance is further exemplified. In this empirical study, management and assessment procedures were better aligned with the ambitions of younger employees within the context of a client-facing call centre (Cutcher, Riach and Tyler, 2022). The tensions observed between the value placed on older workers and their treatment by their direct managers left them feeling confused and vulnerable. Concluding that age represented something that needed to be "fixed", the study found that the older individuals had to "splinter" (ibid, p. 974) their response. They

did so in order to preserve relevance and survive the policies, procedures and values espoused by the organisation. Splintering helped them maintain their occupational identity integrity through the deployment of bifurcated interventions. This is an example of the extent to which normative expectations are founded in chronologically aged-based policies and systems that prevail in the organisational context (Cutcher, Riach and Tyler, 2022). In all three occupational scenarios discussed above (i.e.: boxers, dancers, and call centre workers) irrespective of age or gender, the case could be made for Butler's (2004) un/doing of stereotypical and/or occupational norms.

In the ballet context, in their pursuit for perfection, ballet dancers self-analyse and self-critique endeavouring to meet the demands of the aesthetic, the dance technique, and the teachers (Mainwaring, Krasnow and Kerr, 2001). Perseverance and persistence result in significant sacrifices, often over a long period of time, with the intent of attaining that superlative level of performance where *everything comes together* and the physical cost is lost in the pleasure of artistic achievement (Mainwaring, Krasnow and Kerr, 2001). Their apparent willingness to sacrifice their very being appears to be linked to a commitment to their occupation that goes way beyond mere involvement and not only shapes their bodies but shapes their lives as well. Adopting a very narrow focus to one's career has been observed to result in personal sacrifices (Cardador and Caza, 2012). This willingness to sacrifice everything for the occupation has been seen across other embodied occupations (e.g.: boxers: Wacquant, 1995; ballet: Wainwright and Turner, 2004; football: McGillivray, Fern and McIntosh, 2005; rugby: Coupland, 2015; police officers: Courpasson and Monties, 2017).

In the context of a calling, any barrier that stands in the way of the dancers' performance and self-expression becomes an existential threat to their occupational identity (Schabram and Maitlis, 2017). Therefore, these barriers are overcome in whatever way possible to enable that calling to be answered. Whilst all occupations involve sacrifice to some degree, ballet dancers specifically sacrifice a wide range of aspects of their lives, over and above the sacrifice of their bodies, in their pursuit of the artform. These additional sacrifices include leaving family behind, forfeiting wider social and friendship ties; delaying or foregoing motherhood decisions; and missing out on alternative developmental life experiences (Aalten, 2005; Duffy and Dik, 2013). In addition, from a very young age, ballet dancers have to come to terms with a range of emotions including those relating to the selection process (e.g.: scrutiny, winning, and losing), self-motivation, envy, and regret. The narrow focus on the artform has limiting implications for identity construction for the adolescent ballet student in particular (Buckroyd, 2000; Pickard, 2012). In the process of pursuing their calling, ballet dancers endure pain and injury which can be equated to a sacrifice but, through socialisation,

may not be recognised by the dancers themselves as such (Aalten, 2007; McEwen and Young, 2011; Vassallo, et al., 2019; McNarry, Allen-Collinson and Evans, 2020; Bolling, et al., 2021). Indeed, the normalisation of pain and sacrifice is instead valorised and worn as the mark of achievement (Wulff, 1998; Pickard, 2012).

3.2.6 Good Pain

Extending the body's flexibility and movement capabilities is an aesthetic activity that entails pushing the body beyond its natural physical limits to construct visual lines and choreographic movement (Wulff, 1998; Turner and Wainwright, 2003; Dryburgh and Fortin, 2010; Tarr and Thomas, 2020). It is this disposition to achieve the best version of themselves as dancers that drives them to transcend pain and stoically endure the experience (Mainwaring, Krasnow and Kerr, 2001; Pickard, 2015). Pushing the body beyond its natural boundaries results in pain and the possible risk of injury, but these are seen by dancers as a necessary means to an end (Loland, 2006).

Within the ballet context, experiencing aches, pains, and injuries is a form of language, a shorthand to demonstrate dedication and hard work (Wainwright and Turner, 2004; Aalten, 2007). These are perceived by ballet dancers as badges of honour (Wulff, 1998; Pickard, 2012) inherent in vocational ballet schools and professional ballet companies (Tajet-Foxell and Rose, 1995; Green, 2002, Wainwright and Turner, 2004; Alexias and Dimitropoulou, 2011; Vassallo, et al., 2019; Tarr and Thomas, 2020).

Pain, in the context of ballet, can be divided into two broad categories: 'good' pain and 'bad' pain (McNarry, Allen-Collinson, and Evans, 2020). Good or "Zatopekian" pain is related to those feelings that the individual experiences in the process of improving their physical fitness and capability (Howe, 2004, p. 200). It is largely perceived by athletes and dancers alike to be somewhat pleasurable and related to their sense that the body is being worked to the extent needed to bring about the desired performance improvements (Harrison and Ruddock-Hudson, 2017). It is also seen by some as a sign of strength, willpower, and personal control over one's body and emotions (Pickard, 2015; Gairdner, 2019). Good pain therefore in the ballet context is valorised (Pickard, 2012). While good pain is similarly experiential to bad pain, its role within the societal interface has profound implications for the individual in the organisational context and is therefore addressed here in relation to the 'Idealised Body'. 'Bad' pain, by contrast, has subjective and mostly negative implications for the individual's wellbeing and I deal with it later in this chapter under the 'Subject-Body' heading.

Organisational emphasis on pain management and control is inculcated at an early stage during vocational ballet training to prepare the student dancer for the nature of the task ahead (Buckroyd, 2000). There is a need for vocational students to accept “emotional and physical suffering for the sake of ballet as art” where pain becomes a normalised expectation (Pickard, 2012, p. 43). The intensity and duration of training leads the students to embody it as a core element of their disposition embedded in the habitus (Bourdieu, 1993). It is precisely the endurance of pain and sacrifice, along with the dispositional commitment and *calling* to the art form, that drives the lived experience of being a ballet dancer (Pickard, 2015).

Pain thus becomes a normalised ‘positive’ phenomenon associated with the dancer achieving the aesthetic outcome and it is therefore welcomed rather than experienced negatively (McNarry, Allen-Collinson and Evans, 2020; Tarr and Thomas, 2020). This is exemplified where a participant in Pickard’s study describes herself as gaining pleasure from the freedom that she feels: “… *I am free and flying when I am jumping…I feel beautiful, then I know it [pain] is all worth it”* (Pickard, 2015, p. 72). In the positive sense, ballet dancers invest arduous training, pain, and risk injury, in the pursuit of driving performance excellence (McEwen and Young, 2011; Maitlis, 2022), and when achieved they can experience a sense of physical euphoria or ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Hefferon and Ollis, 2006) *when it all comes together* on the day. The pain involved is perceived as a process that leads to competency (McNarry, Allen-Collinson and Evans, 2020; Tarr and Thomas, 2020). Consequently, in the competitive world of ballet, participants continue to pursue perfection through the process of bodily accumulation that is sedimented as physical capital (Riach and Cutcher, 2014). They push their bodies to meet organisational demands at the risk of their wellbeing or even injury, which could be career limiting (Green, 1999; Pickard, 2012, 2015).

In theory, striking a balance between developing the physical aesthetic, technical ability, and cultivating artistic capital, is what is needed to create a holistic dancer (Fonteyn, 1975; Pickard, 2012). In practice, however, chronic more minor injuries tend to become part of everyday experiences and it is only when they transform into something more serious and debilitating that they appear in the consciousness of the dancer (Tarr and Thomas, 2020). Listening to the body and maintaining a healthy understanding of bodily awareness does not always materialise and overburdening the body can result in ‘bad’ pain, which I address at 3.4.2 below, and potential injury with its concomitant implications (Tarr and Thomas, 2020). The presence of pain and injury has an influence on how an individual, at any stage of their career, experiences age(ing).

3.2.7 Forever Young

The importance of the experience of age(ing) is that it is the only embodied identity characteristic that constantly changes over time throughout one's lifetime (Weiss and Lang, 2012; Thomas, et al., 2014; Manor, 2017). In this section I address age(ing) as it relates to the idealised body more generally, and then more specifically its visualisation in the balletic context. Firstly, I position age as it relates to the body and its role as a visual marker in identity construction. I then explore extant literature that has addressed age(ing) in this context. That is followed by the positioning of age(ing) in relation to the balletic body with a specific focus on classical ballet.

The body, and therefore age, as a visual and material marker of identity plays a significant role in locating an individual in society and, more specifically, within the employment context (Tulle, 2015). Enshrined within the concept of the body is that aspirational element that can be described as the idealised body (Foster, 1997). While the idealised body remains an intangible notion, it is a significant contributor to occupational identity (Aalten, 2007). Inextricably enshrined in the notion of the body too is the age(ing) process that renders the interpretation of that body, from time to time, a temporal entity (Jack, Riach and Bariola, 2019). It is this temporality that is informed by the age(ing) process. It, therefore, has relevance in addressing the individual's lived experience in relation to the idealised body and how the individual responds to organisational control (Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2021). Consequently, organisations have a vested interest in the body, recognising its significance in the wider understanding of its role at work (Johansson, Tienary and Valtonen, 2017).

Occupational identity is socially constructed (Phelan and Kinsella, 2009; Caza, Moss and Vough, 2018), even in occupations where the body is not crafted for purpose. The biological ageing process has a direct impact on the ability of an individual to maintain congruence with that identity (Tulle, 2008; Coupland, 2016). Also, age(ing) is at the intersection of the body/identity nexus and constitutes a complex material marker of multi-layered histories (Riach and Cutcher, 2014). Therefore, excluding the material body, and by implication age(ing) from identity construction, understates an inextricable component of identity (Knights and Clarke, 2017).

In the broader OS literature, there has been a significant preoccupation with the idealised body (e.g.: Merilainen, Tienary and Valtonen, 2015; Johansson, Tienary and Valtonen, 2017) but there is a paucity of research in relation to age(ing) and that notion of the body. Age(ing), however, has been addressed in terms of the idealised body in the adjacent fields of sociology, and sports and exercise (e.g.: Wainwright and Turner, 2003 and 2006; Phoenix and Sparkes, 2007; Tulle, 2015). Even within careers not specifically oriented towards physical endeavour, acquiring, maintaining, and developing

physical capital may be considered essential in relation to the idealised body (Witz, Warhurst and Nickson, 2017).

Bringing into focus the occupational age/body/identity nexus in a youth-venerating occupation, Riach and Cutcher (2014) studied male hedge fund traders in the City of London. The study highlighted the significant impact on self-identity and how masculine norms were reproduced within the organisational culture. Increasingly, such norms defined how individuals took ownership and negotiated the process of ageing at work whilst maintaining congruence with the idealised body (Foweraker and Cutcher, 2015). In an effort to remain 'forever young', and therefore maintaining their self-worth, the male traders engaged in physical exercise and bodily cosmetic procedures to counter ageing. Their aims were to continue to look lean, muscular, and ready for the challenging task of financial trading (Riach and Cutcher, 2014). It is the accumulation of this physical capital, emotional, and psychological experiences that are influenced by the shape and style of institutional policies, procedures and norms. These, in turn, inform organisational management and control in relation to the idealised body and the individual's response to its maintenance (Calasanti, 2009; Riach and Cutcher, 2014; Thomas, et al., 2015).

Ballet organisations, just like any other organisation, want to remain immortal (Riach and Kelly, 2015). Organisational leaders may engage in 'vampiric' practices that will pursue the sustenance of the organisation at the expense of *other* people, mostly their employees (Riach and Kelly, 2015). Since human resources (people) have finite utility (i.e.: they age), the organisation needs to continually attract, develop, and retain *new blood*. They discard the *empty bodies* that have served the organisation's purpose and are considered to be no longer of any value (Riach and Kelly, 2015).

Where ballet organisations differ from most mainstream organisations is that ballet is an aesthetic artform which is steeped in centuries' old traditions and founded on choreography and socialisation. That rich tradition has been handed down from one generation to the next where ballet is likened to a "secret society" Khudaverdian, 2006, p. 170). It will tend to resist changes as far as possible, while mainstream business organisations will more readily adapt to changing conditions and technologies (Wulff, 2001; Pickard, 2012).

Ballet is generally conceptualised as a young person's occupation (Wainwright and Turner, 2006; Bolwell, 2017) where a continual pipeline of new talent is perpetuated, replacing less proficient members and older declining dancers. In this context, I focus on the notion of a youth-venerating occupation and the implications of age(ing) for ballet dancers in a highly competitive workplace. Given the nature of the embodied craft, ballet dancers are inclined to be more bodily aware than the average individual. They are more attuned to bodily changes they experience in their daily task (Rodrigues, et al., 2020).

Classical ballet dancers, therefore, offer a specific opportunity to investigate age as it relates to the idealised body, which I discuss below.

Firstly, it is necessary to distinguish classical ballet and other forms of dance generally categorised as contemporary dance. A number of studies have addressed contemporary dance, which provides an appropriate vehicle for older dancers to continue to dance into later life (e.g.: Schwaiger, 2012; Coupland, 2013; Bolwell, 2017; Brandstetter and Nakajima, 2017; Southcott and Joseph, 2019; Markula, et al., 2022; Rustad and Engelsrud, 2022). Since ballet dancers are said to become their bodies in terms of their occupational identities (Wainwright, Williams and Turner, 2005; Langdon and Petracca, 2010; Pickard, 2012), age(ing) becomes a key consideration in this context. The task that is performed will also have an impact on the age(ing) process and it is my contention, therefore, that classical ballet should be addressed separately (Wainwright and Turner, 2003).

Age(ing), specifically in classical ballet, has been narrowly addressed by few studies. These usually focused on an intersecting phenomenon (e.g.: pain and injury: Wainwright and Turner, 2003, 2006; changes of interest: Aalten, 2005, career-transitioning model: Roncaglia, 2006, 2007, 2010; self-identity and social support: Willard and Lavallee, 2016; person job-fit over the lifespan: Rodrigues, et al., 2020). The extant literature on ageing in ballet has generally taken the perspective of the retired ballet dancer, centred around the career transitioning process and beyond (e.g.: Wainwright and Turner, 2006; Roncaglia, 2007; Willard and Lavallee, 2016). To date, there has been a paucity of studies addressing the lived experience of age(ing) by active professional ballet dancers. I first address age(ing) at work as it relates to the object-body in Section 3.4.3 before delving into the subjective lived experience of the individual.

3.3 The Object-Body

In the context of my study, the object-body represents that interpretation by the individual of the role of their body as a tool. It is that body that is worked on and with by the individual in the pursuit of their task (Green, 1991, 2001; Alexias and Dimitrpoulou, 2011; Lawrence, et al., 2022). It also represents an interpretation by certain authors as the object upon which society and the organisation gazes. In the employment context, this gives effect to discursive power, discipline and surveillance (Tyler and Abbott, 1998; Trethewey, 1999).

Since my study is founded in the realm of OS, it is relevant for me to address those studies where the organisation is perceived to have influence and act on the individual's body. In this respect, OS studies in the past have widely deployed social

constructionist approaches to identity research. These explored the influences of organisational power, discipline and surveillance (Corlett, et al., 2017; Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2021). Amongst these studies, Foucauldian approaches have extended into the realms of dance research and sports & exercise studies.

In the Foucauldian paradigm, emanating mostly from his 'Discipline and Punish' (1977) work, identity is assumed to be socially inscribed on the body through discourse (Bardon and Peze, 2020). It is seen as comprised of the intellectual elements informing the individual's interaction with the cultural environment (Knights and Clarke, 2017; Brown, 2019). Social constructionist thinking, founded in the Cartesian mind/body duality, privileging the mind, positions the body epistemologically inferior in relation to the social world (Anderson, 2003), and defines the body as socially constructed (Shilling, 2012). This is because the material body is perceived as a biologically oriented function and is seen to fall outside the notion of culture in a scenario where social discourse is the medium for identity construction (Howson, 2013). Discourse is, therefore, deemed to be the determinant of the body, and renders it an "absent presence" (Shilling, 2012, p. 12). This absence presence notion of the body has been observed to prevail in OS (Leder, 1990; Tretheway, 1999; Riach and Cutcher, 2014; Brown and Coupland, 2015; Knights and Clarke, 2017; Courpasson and Monties, 2017). Discourses surrounding identity remain disparate (e.g.: discursive, symbolic, dramaturgical, and psychoanalytic) with little scope for homogenisation but, simultaneously facilitate a rich tapestry of approaches that accommodate divergent but constructive thinking (Corlett, et al., 2017). Adopting Foucauldian thinking, the locus of control and therefore agency is centred in society, and the body is a mere receptor of command (Godfrey, Lilley and Brewis, 2012). The habituation of this practice ultimately results in lateral and self-surveillance which perpetuate organisational influence. The organisation is able to discipline and control individuals through this process which ultimately leads to the production of "docile bodies" (i.e.: unskilled bodies that are transformed into competent and skilled but docile workers) (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). This transformation is depicted as the "clay soldier" (Foucault, 1977, p. 135).

Foucauldian thinking has been shown above to be helpful in studies addressing scenarios related to power and organisational control over the body, but its epistemology is reductionist and limits knowledge to that discovered through the medium of discourse (McNay, 1999). In his later work, Foucault (1984, 1986, 1988) underwent a radical shift in thinking and acknowledged the individual's role in the process of acting for themselves in the face of organisational power and control. Having postulated all along that the individual had no agency over their body, almost a decade after his 'Discipline and Punish' (1977) work, Foucault's revised thinking incorporated a mechanism through

which the individual recognises themselves as a subject and performs interventions which he refers to as "technologies of the self" (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). Without motivating his basis for the shift of position (Wolkowitz, 2006), those technologies, Foucault (1988) argued, enabled the individual to carry out a limited range of functions over their own bodies that he perceived as objectives, pursuing a positive state of being. In effect, Foucault (1988) acknowledges that the body is influenced, if not fully experienced, but the locus of agency, according to him, remains with society. This shift in his own philosophical positioning sowed an air of doubt that was, to some extent, instrumental in studies seeking alternative theoretical foundations (McNay, 1999).

A further complication is the notion of the mind/body divide, which remains a contentious debate (Shilling, 2012; Lawrence, et al, 2022) as it has implications for the body in relation to agency. With the differing positions held by Foucault between his earlier works (1977) where the body is seen to be docile, and his latter, partly incomplete, works (1984, 1986, 1988) where the individual is attributed some agency, one has to be cautious to distinguish research undertaken under these two differing perspectives. The Foucauldian framework, however, remains the basis for identity research in OS continuing throughout the 21st Century. Reservations though have emerged about the body's docility that is inherent in the Foucauldian concept (e.g.: Thornborrow and Brown, 2009; Coupland, 2014; Clark and Markula, 2017).

3.3.1 Power, Discipline and Surveillance

Organisational power and discipline are executed through processes and practices that are discursively constructed (van Amsterdam, Claringbould and Knoppers, 2017). In terms of Foucauldian thought, the material body does not exist outside of discursive ontology and is constituted solely as text (Schwaiger, 2012). Consequently, taking a Foucauldian perspective, the body is "never *experienced* by the individual" (Styhre, 2004, p. 102). Central to Foucauldian theory, the panopticon effect is a process through which the organisation creates a sense of continual and unpredictable surveillance which leads the individual to perform behaviours which align with organisational norms whether they are being overtly observed or not (Foucault, 1977).

Taking the debate further, Coupland (2015) deploys the Bourdieusian framework alongside the Foucauldian discursive theory to study the organisation's commodification of the rugby player's bodies. The organisation thus requires from the individual to develop and accumulate knowledge, skills, and expertise (physical capital) sufficient for them to acquit themselves of their task.

The paradox with this process, Coupland argues, is that the more work that the rugby players put into the body to prepare it for the task (accumulating physical capital), the greater the wear and tear and the faster the peak and point of physical erosion is reached (also Wacquant, 1995). The processes of wear and tear, injury, and ageing conspire to bring about the temporality of a crafted for purpose embodied career that ballet dancers experience in much the same way as that of the rugby players (Coupland, 2015; Wainwright and Turner, 2006). These processes entail an individual's dispositional willingness (i.e.: habitus) to sacrifice their bodies, unquestioningly, in the execution of their task (Coupland, 2015; boxers: Wacquant, 1995; dancers: Green, 1999).

Surveillance by the institution, as well as the individual's self-scrutiny (Wainwright, Williams, and Turner, 2005), can lead to both positive and negative outcomes with tensions emanating from a pervasive culture of weight management and body discontent (Benn and Walters, 2001; Dryburgh and Fortin, 2010). The ideal ballet body image is propagated and inculcated by the organisation through the omnipresence of wall-to-wall mirrors in the ballet studio where dancers are organised in orderly rows facing the teacher, thus rendering the controlling gaze on their bodies inescapable (Green, 1999, 2001). The informal status within a vocational ballet class is, to a large extent, dependent on how well the dancer performs and how the body shape and weight meet the criterion of the organisation (Green, 1999, 2001).

The presence of the mirrors, their reflected image, the constant gaze by the teacher, and peer-surveillance, all contribute to the dancers objectifying the perception of their bodies (Shilling, 2012). This separation of the body, as distinct from the self, exacerbates the dancers' perfectionistic tendencies and renders them vulnerable to pushing the limits of their bodies at the expense of their wellbeing (Pickard, 2012). This tendency to '*other*' the body and separate it from themselves, treating it as a tool, is counterintuitive because the body and the self are inseparable in the execution of ballet (Jackson, 2005).

Unquestioning students' compliance with teachers' strict directions has been ballet's long-standing teaching formula (Zeller, 2017) where ballet teachers are in a position of power and control (McEwen and Young, 2011). The authoritarian pedagogic model has been deemed to be necessary to prepare the students for their future as elite professional dancers (Zeller, 2017). Some teachers even consider the concept of positive feedback, achievement recognition, and providing support for their students as counter-productive in the realm of vocational ballet training (Buckroyd, 2000). On the one hand, a good ballet teacher is recognised to be indispensable in bringing out the best in students (Pickard, 2012). On the other hand, teacher behaviours including shouting, hitting, insulting, name-calling, the use of foul language, and inappropriate temper

tantrums have been known to be fairly widespread (Buckroyd, 2000). The outcome leads to a process of bullying by the teacher, a dynamic that has damaging implications for student's identity (Buckroyd, 2000). An aspect of dance training that further isolates the student and enhances the propensity for abuse is the physical separation from society enforced at full-time boarding vocational ballet schools (Buckroyd, 2000). The student is, however, complicit in this cycle of ill treatment in that they perceive the power and influence of the organisation to be all encompassing and pivotal to their future development and employment. They therefore allow themselves to be poorly treated (Buckroyd, 2000).

Everything in ballet is judged to fall short of requirements seemingly irrespective of how well an individual complies (Bussell and Mackrell, 1999). Even those dancers who have a positive affinity with their bodies harbour some aspect of dissatisfaction or inclination to treat the body as a separate unfinished project (Wainwright and Turner, 2006; Dryburgh and Fortin, 2010). Aesthetics, particularly at the pubescent stage, is at the nexus of the ballet body and identity construction (Pickard, 2012). These formative years of the young dancer plays a defining role in their identity formation (Marcia, 1980; Buckroyd, 2000). This leads to the dancers disregarding their own bodies' sensory impulses, and to comply instead with the overriding demands from their god-status teachers and coaches (Green, 1999, 2001).

This docility goes beyond the performing aspect of the body and encompasses the requirement for a certain aesthetic compliance (Trethewey, 1999; Tyler and Abbott, 1998; Warhurst and Nickson, 2009; Haynes, 2012b; Riach and Cutcher, 2014). However, the body, its performance, and its aesthetics play a vital role in determining an individual's ability to acquire and maintain their occupational identities (Bardon and Peze, 2020). I further investigate the role of the body in identity construction relative to societal influences by addressing embodied resistance.

Making the case for the study of embodied identity and how individuals constructed their occupational identities in opposition to management demands, Courpasson and Monties (2017) investigated 39 (male and female) specially trained French police officers, engaged in high-risk firearms and homicide policing. Their longitudinal ethnographic study was conducted in a scenario where management required of these police officers to transition from active physical policing to desk-bound clerical work. The police officers objected to this transformation and engaged in a process of embodied resistance by maintaining physical fitness, cleanliness, and professionalism in an endeavour to retain their self-image and self-styled occupational identity (Courpasson and Monties, 2017).

This study makes the case for placing the emphasis on the body/identity nexus (Courpasson and Monties, 2017) as opposed to the customary privileged mind discursive perspective to identity construction (Wolkowitz, 2006; Knights and Clarke, 2017). In this regard, the study endeavoured to illuminate the interrelationship between the individual and their working environment and how the use of the police officers' bodies established meaning in the context of social interaction (Hallett, et al., 2009).

While it is necessary for the police officers to abide by management policies to retain employment in the longer term, the body is not politically neutral and *is* indeed engaged in the process of self-regulation and identity construction (see Foucault's "technologies of the self", p.66). The individual can modify the body, can train, and shape the body, since it is ever present. In other words, the body is not an inanimate, docile, or passive entity inhabited by the individual but rather an integrated unified whole (Waskul and Van der Riet, 2002). This contrasts with other findings that have also taken a Foucauldian approach (e.g.: Godfrey, Lilley and Brewis, 2012; Brown and Coupland, 2015).

The importance of the studies in this section to my research is that they contribute to the understanding of how organisational messaging, power and control influence the occupational identity construction of the individual. They form the basis of this understanding but also present specific limitations in relation to the narrow interpretation of the body as defined by discourse alone (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

3.3.2 From Domination to Participation

The narrow interpretation of the body enshrined in Foucault's Discipline and Punish (1977) as being 'docile' has been critiqued and even where, in broad terms, the Foucauldian approach has been deployed, certain authors have questioned the validity of this narrow interpretation (e.g.: Thornborrow and Brown, 2009; Clark and Markula, 2017; Courpasson and Monties, 2017). The somewhat draconian nature of considering the body docile renders the individual subject to societal and organisational pressure without any notion of agency or recourse. As addressed earlier, in his latter works, Foucault (1984; 1986; 1988) adjusted his stance and made tentative steps towards accommodating the notion of individual agency within his theorising. In this section, I address relevant works that relate to this revised interpretation of the body docility and its implications for identity construction.

In a case-study investigating the experiences of recreational dancers in a commercial dance studio in Canada, patriarchal dominance and the apparent docility of the body were observed to have significant influence on the participants' experience

(Clark and Markula, 2017). However, the dancers were voluntarily taking part in arduous bodily training and discipline, an activity that the dancers highly valued themselves (Clark and Markula, 2017). Consequently, observing that organisational political power and the relationship with the body is "neither linear nor absolute, rather it is complex, messy and constantly changing", the researchers questioned the notion that the body is indeed rendered docile (Clark and Markula, 2017, p. 449). A notable departure here from the earlier writings is that Clark and Markula (2017) reject the notion of bodily docility despite having deployed a Foucauldian approach overall. This led me to investigate the notion of bodily docility further and I was drawn to the realm of the military to further explore this phenomenon.

As with ballet dancers and other professional sports occupations, paratroopers undertake highly disciplined training in one of the most arduous and rigorous forms of physical discipline. Taking a Foucauldian approach in addressing occupational identities in a British Parachute Regiment, Thornborrow and Brown (2009) investigated the paratroopers' quest to achieve recognition for preparedness, professionalism, and fitting of the elite image of the regiment.

This was investigated by deploying a Foucauldian disciplinary/power theory, where individuals were studied to establish how they achieved their goals through the process of discipline by the executions of "technologies of the self" (Foucault, 1988, p. 18). The paratroopers considered themselves to be conformant participants with adequate intellect to be able to reason what the consequences and benefits were for their occupational identities (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009). The paratroopers' bodies were found not to be docile but instead, complicit in their identity construction. As a consequence, the narrative that the organisation deploys in respect of these aspirational identities was seen to suppress, but did not erase agency (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009).

The notion that the body is rendered totally 'docile' in the hands of the organisation/society has been further queried on the grounds that the docile body ignores the active role that the body plays in social practices (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009; Clark and Markula 2017; Pickard, 2012). If the body is docile, then there would be no role for the body in identity construction other than to receive commands. It is notable that authors adopting alternative perspectives have also critiqued the Foucauldian notion of bodily docility (e.g.: Pickard, 2012; Turner and Wainwright, 2003; Khudaverdian, 2006). Even with the limited influence that Foucault permits in his latter works, Foucauldian thinking remains influenced by the Cartesian mind/body divide premise (Shilling, 2012).

Acknowledging the contribution made by Foucault (1977/1995) in relation to the disciplinary requirements and surveillance implications inherent in the ballet culture and teaching, Pickard (2013) challenges the notion of the body being docile and observes that, in many instances, young ballet students either reinforced their habitus position by adjusting their disposition or modified it by incorporating social influences into the body (e.g.: follow a dietary regime). Bodily shaping is "done *by* the body" rather than by the organisation or society (Pickard, 2013, p. 4). The young ballet student therefore has agency (choice) to continue in the role despite the challenges, or alternatively to opt out of the occupation (Clark and Markula, 2017; Courpasson and Monties, 2017; Zeller, 2017). This supports the observations that identity is comprised of aspects that have both an organisational/societal component of influence (organisational habitus), as well as an individual agentic component of self-discipline and self-surveillance (individual habitus) that jointly contribute to occupational identity construction (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009; Clark and Markula, 2017). In this respect, age(ing) plays a role in the experience of occupational identity and in the next section, I address the implications of age for the individual within the context of work.

3.3.3 Age at Work

In this section I address age(ing) as it relates to the object body and its role in organising in the work context. Initially, I address age as a material marker of identity, and then as a statutory instrument in the workplace. I then consider the ambiguity about age ranges and what constitutes the older worker. That is followed by the consideration of alternative conceptualisations of age where organisations endeavour to overcome the limitations of chronological age as a single means of organising work. Finally, I address the case for embodied occupations with a specific focus on classical ballet.

In the past, identity tended to be studied from a discursive perspective (Knights and Clarke, 2017, Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2021). Limiting studies therefore to a discursive epistemology, where society inscribes meaning on the body, potentially foregoes the opportunity to explore those broader experiential aspects of identity construction. Indeed, where the material body is absent from consideration, age(ing) - an embodied characteristic - is equally absent (Laz, 2003; Martin and Twigg, 2018). In recent times though efforts have been made to address the body more holistically rather than taking a purely discursive turn (Knights and Clarke, 2017; Courpasson and Monties, 2017; Sergeeva, Faraj and Hyusman, 2020; Pouthier and Sondak, 2021; Lawrence, et al., 2022). This too has implications for age and age(ing).

From a theoretical perspective, age can be conceptualised as a material marker on the body and having multi-dimensional facets that are brought about by immersing oneself in the organisational context (De Lange, et al., 2021). Whilst a number of alternative conceptualisations of age are available (e.g.: functional, psychosocial, organisational and lifespan development) (Sterns and Doverspike, 1989), organisations tend to deploy chronological age as the sole mechanism for organising labour (De Lange, et al., 2021). Recent research has supported the contention that chronological age is a weak predictor of capability or decline (Beier, et al., 2022). Other factors such as biological, social, environmental and normative work experiences have a direct influence on an individual's outcome that may differ significantly from another at a similar chronological age (Beier, et al., 2022).

Age in the workplace is not only an organising criterium but is also a statutorily defined concept. Nonetheless, the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) expressed difficulty in addressing the full range of people in work, particularly those active above the age of 65 (6.7% of all economically active people) in the UK (CIPD, 2022, p. 3). The statistical analysis that is provided by the State defines the range to be between 16-64 years of age (CIPD, 2022). This age range appears to be mired in antiquity where many people started working at age 16 and there was a set retirement age of 65 – a situation that no longer prevails in the current work environment (CIPD, 2022). Depending on the country, policy or organ of state, the older worker can be conceptualised as young as 45 (Pitt-Catsouphes and Smyer, 2006) but generally thresholds of 55 or 65 are more prevalent (McCarthy, et al., 2014). In these instances, however, the authors are addressing that final stage of employment generally related to preparation for, or transition to, retirement. Consequently, to-date there is no singular definition of what constitutes the 'older worker'.

According to the extant OS literature, ageing is socially constructed (Wainwright and Turner, 2006; Finemann, 2011; McCarthy, et al., 2014) with (normally negative) stereotypes dominating decision-making in the workplace. This prevails despite the fact that these stereotypes are largely unsupported in empirical studies (Loch, et al., 2010; Kooij, et al, 2011; Ng and Feldman, 2012; Urick and Hollensbe, 2014; Ng, 2021). Ng and Feldman (2012) found that the most common stereotypes relating to age were predominantly centred on the 'Fourth Age' – typically beyond 80 years of age where the subjects are in the late stages of ageing, declining, and nearing death (Gilleard and Higgs, 2010). Therefore, the age-group upon which the stereotypes are generally based falls outside of the top-end of the age continuum for older people considered generally to be in the workforce. The Fourth Age 'group' also falls outside of those older workers as defined in UK legislation in all its respects. However, despite societal influences

constructing age, it is notable that the body as a material phenomenon, is compellingly underpinned by its ageing characteristics (Thomas, et al., 2014). This renders age(ing) a complex phenomenon in relation to the body and, consequently, identity (Lawrence, et al. 2022). With few exceptions there remains a lacuna of studies in relation to age(ing) in respect of the role that youth plays in the workplace (Thomas, et al., 2014; Ainsworth, 2020).

Further, age(ing) in the workplace itself is a highly confused landscape. For example, in a large empirical cross-industry study in Ireland, the decision makers' definition of '*who is old at work?'* ranged from as young as 28 and as old as 75 (McCarthy, et al., 2014). Therefore, taking the more traditional approach to the problematisation of age(ing), based on discursively defined fixed stereotypical categories, does not address age(ing) at work (Thomas, et al., 2014). Even where only older individuals are considered, there exists a wide variety of physiological, social, and biological 'ages' that are divergent from stereotypes at any given chronological age (McCarthy, et al., 2014; Ainsworth, 2020). This has been shown in an empirical study where organisational age norms are discursively deployed by both senior and junior management alike. In this situation where the line managers are chronologically younger than most of their direct reports, they were found to devise policies and practices that favoured younger reports (Cutcher, Riach and Tyler, 2022). This practice further embedded chronological age stereotypes with resultant tensions between the two levels of management. This also had negative outcomes for the older workers, that saw them respond with practices of resistance and disruption to the team in which they worked (Cutcher, Riach and Tyler, 2022). These tensions evolved into counter-intuitively outcomes for the organisation where both management and the older workers experienced a sense of "mutual vulnerability" (Cutcher, Riach and Tyler, 2022, p. 988). Age groups are not comprised of homogenous participants with individuals displaying divergent behaviours (Thomas, et al., 2014; Beier, et al., 2022). Chronological age is, therefore, too reductionist in nature for it to be of much value in addressing the consequences and implications of age(ing) for both the organisation and the individual (Gilleard and Higgs, 2013; Thomas, et al., 2014). Occupational identity construction is directly impacted by this chrononormative practice.

Age(ing), therefore within the context of employment, remains complex and controversial. When organisations do deviate from chronological age as the norm, they have been observed to deploy approaches within the concept of 'organisational age' (McCarthy, et al., 2014). Founded in a large cross-industry study in Ireland, the question of who constitutes an 'older worker' was addressed by organisational decision-makers in terms of tenure, career stage, and organisational norms. Within these interpretations

of age, these decision-makers displayed preferences based on retirement planning horizons and industry norms to define the 'older worker' (McCarthy, et al., 2014). Yet other approaches have gained favour amongst HR practitioners (Parry and Urwin, 2011; National Academies of Sciences, 2020).

One such definition, generational cohort theory (GCT) (Strauss and Howe, 1991) is a US-centric concept that has been deployed since the late 20th Century. However, GCT has been shown to have significant limitations as it assumes that each generational cohort shares similar behaviours, attitudes and attributes (Thomas, et al., 2014; Beier, et al., 2022) and ignores such differences within each purported cohort. This concept, outside of a homogenous uniform society and in the globalised employment context, cannot unquestioningly be assumed to apply (National Academies of Sciences, 2020). Within GCT itself there are disparities across geographical regions in relation to birth boundary year thresholds that apply to each cohort (Dencker, et al., 2008). Accordingly, the manner in which GCT diminishes the complexity of age to simplistic stereotypical norms renders it inappropriate to be deployed in the process of workplace organising (Thomas, et al., 2014).

Further considerations are the differences between the male-centric linear notion of work, and the "body politics of surprise" associated with the female form (Jack, Riach and Bariola, 2019, p. 139). This is where female workers experiences differ from those more aligned with male-oriented chrononormativity. Organising at work has been held by the feminists to follow a more linear, chronological pattern as opposed to being more sensitive to the irregular (interrupted) pattern of work associated with female engagement in the workplace (Jack, Riach and Bariola, 2019). This theoretical construct is founded in Grosz's (1994, 2004, 2005) interpretation of the Bergsonian concept of time (1988). This is where two modalities of time are identified, namely: 'linear' (or chrononormative) time, and 'lived' time. The latter, lived time, is associated with female transitional bodily episodes (e.g.: pregnancy; menopause; caring) where workers experiences differ from those aligned with male-oriented linear chrononormativity (Jack, Riach and Bariola, 2019).

The imposition of chrononormative organising at work was reflected in an empirical study investigating the experiences of older workers navigating the organisational implications of undergoing an apprenticeship (Leonard, Fuller and Unwin, 2018). This study highlighted that the organisation's commitment to the corporate age paradigm was based upon their sense of linear time. This was despite the organisation's choice to engage older workers as apprentices out of step with their chrononormative age stage. Consequently, the older apprentices themselves had to negotiate their own occupational identity without the support of the organisation. Indeed, in order to fit in,

they had to suppress their past experience and life stage age-congruent behaviours (Leonard, Fuller and Unwin, 2018).

The resultant outcome for these later-life apprentices was that they had to adapt to the linear chrononormative stance taken by the organisation including younger co-workers (apprentices). They also had to resist societal pressures outside of the organisation that aligned with the traditional chrononormative paradigm. While the body 'politic of surprise' is conceptualised as pertaining to females and their differential experience of the body and age at work, its application has been shown to pertain to both genders. Leonard, Fuller and Unwin (2018) reflected that temporality of engagement and experience is more relevant to the individual than the linear chrononormativity enshrined in organisational culture and dogma. The 'politic of surprise' contrasts with the normative linear functionality where it bifurcates intention and outcome and may be a more fitting approach to organising in this context (Cutcher, Riach and Tyler, 2022). Taking the non-linear interpretation of time enshrined in the 'politic of surprise' would have accommodated the linear notion of the lived experience of the older apprentices whilst re-shaping their skillset in relation to their apprenticeship and new occupation.

Age, seen through the feminist lens, is an element inextricably enshrined in the concept of 'bodily accumulation' where growing older is reconceptualised as an ongoing and cumulative process, rather than an event where ageing is seen to be a "break with the past" (Cutcher and Riach, 2014, p. 772). Accordingly, age is seen as instrumental in the individual acquiring skills, experience and attributes that are of benefit to them and exchangeable with the organisation/society. Since age(ing) is synonymous with growth and development in this paradigm, it should position the older worker as a more attractive proposition than younger workers. Paradoxically, however, older workers remain stereotypically associated with requiring additional inputs and resources, rendering them a less attractive option for employers (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2008).

Feminist research has furthered understanding of these differences and highlighted the disruptive or subversive potential for females to behave in ways that challenge, and even breach, those male-centric organisational norms (Riach, Rumens and Tyler, 2014). Indeed, their research has extended the notion of the need for un/doing (Butler, 2004) of these linear work-norms to be more recognisant of diversity on the grounds of sex, gender, and age. This would provide for greater flexibility in relation to policies, procedures and values that relate to both male and female individuals at different temporal phases of their careers (Riach, Rumens and Tyler, 2014).

Contemporary work in the field of OS has started to explore age in relation to younger people, extending the debate to those periods pre-retirement planning. These studies

though, often have a focus on the intersectionality between age and gender (or other protected characteristics) that have implications for identity construction (e.g.: Riach, Rumens and Tyler, 2014; Riach and Cutcher, 2014; Foweraker and Cutcher, 2015; Jack, Riach and Bariola, 2019; Ozturk, Rumens and Tatli, 2020; Cutcher, Riach and Tyler, 2022). Extending the Stern and Doverspike (1989) alternative conceptualisation of age model, McCarthy, et al., (2014) identified further subgroupings of the notion of age. These provide an opportunity to better understand how organisational decision-makers, in mainstream employment, categorised and defined who is 'old' at work. The authors also better defined those elements making up "functional age" and identified two subgroups namely: "physical age" and "age appearance" (McCarthy, et al., 2014, p. 389). Physical age and age appearance are of relevance to the balletic occupation (Pickard, 2020).

Functional age is based on a worker's abilities and performance in relation to a specific task (Sharkey, 1987; Kooij, et al., 2008). It is positively associated with employability (De Lange, et al., 2021), but not generally associated with the workplace. Instead, it is better known in the realm of gerontology (Gilleard and Higgs, 2013; De Lange, et al, 2021). An explanation, therefore, as to why age at work remains an under-researched area in OS may be that the concept of age has been associated with the stereotypical notion of limitation, decline, being *aged (geriatric),* and infirm (Thomas, et al., 2015; Ainsworth, 2020; Kunze, Boehm and Bruch, 2021). There remains, therefore, a gap in the literature to explore the human condition in relation to these organisationally established linear work norms, suggesting that for both male and female workers there is scope for a more inclusive politic of ageing within both organisational practice and research (Riach, Rumens and Tyler, 2014).

Accordingly, there is scope for further research within OS with regards to ageing at work with a particular focus on the experiential dimension, that is the ageing aspect *lived* and *felt* by the individual (see 'Old at 25' in the sub-section below). The implications of age for occupational identity are not restricted to embodied occupations as was shown in Section 3.3.7 'Forever Young' above. Cultural norms were seen to have a significant bearing on the individual, their body and age(ing) (Riach and Cutcher, 2014). To explore the notion of embodied identity, however, embodied occupations have a key role to play because of the proximity of the body to the execution of the task. Dance is growing in influence in this field (Rustad and Engelsrud, 2022).

While the majority of participants in a body-centric occupation will likely be career limited at a characteristic chronological age, everyone will have a unique experience (e.g.: some needing to career transition earlier; others later; but the majority around that characteristic age group) (Allen and Hopkins, 2015). Strikingly, even where the

intersectionality of social and work identities are addressed (e.g.: Miscenko and Day, 2016), visible social categories such as gender, race/ethnicity, and group diversity have all been considered. Strangely though, age as a visible and embodied category, has not been included (Ainsworth, 2020). Excluding the body, and therefore age, from identity construction understates an inextricable component of identity. In the following section, I address the subject notion of the body.

3.4 The Subject-Body

In the preceding section, I reviewed empirical works within the fields of OS, ballet, and sport & exercise science where they explored the societal/individual nexus and the role of the body in embodied occupations. The general nature of these studies has been directed towards the interface between the social world (i.e.: society/organisation) and the individual's response to that world (Shilling, 2012). The focus of my study is, however, to gain an understanding that goes beyond those responses by the individual to the social world in remunerated employment. I seek, as suggested by Hockey and Allen-Collinson (2009), to explore the individual's lived experience, or *feeling*, of their occupational identity and the influence of the body, and age(ing), in that process. This section addresses those literatures that have taken a phenomenological approach to the body as it relates to identity.

Arguing that the emotive nature of the artform (ballet) and the physicality of dance cannot be studied as text, Turner and Wainwright (2003) made the case for an embodied approach which was later supported by Aalten (2005). When trying to analyse ballet as text or via discourse, the experiential performative dimension of dancing is lost and, as a result, the lived body disappears from consideration. In this scenario, where a reductionist epistemology prevails and discourse alone is considered to be knowledge, the self becomes "strangely disembodied" (Wainwright and Turner, 2003, p. 273).

The inextricable relationship between the body and the self, and the presence of individual agency are highlighted by extreme occupations within OS (Courpasson and Monties, 2017), and make more salient the dynamics involved in the interrelationship between the individual and management (Flyvbjerg, 2011). This body/identity nexus focus is an area worthy of further exploration (Corlett, et al., 2017; Knights and Clarke, 2017; van Amsterdam and van Eck, 2019; Brown, 2020; Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2021) where rather than being constructed through language, the body is studied as lived and experienced (Gimlin, 2007). It is the fleshy experience that aligns with Merleau-Ponty's view that the individuals' awareness of themselves is inextricably linked to their bodies and the way their bodies engage with the world (Tulle, 2015). In other words, Merleau-

Ponty posited that we do not simply have bodies but *are* indeed our bodies (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). The body, therefore, is a dynamic and effective component in identity construction worthy of further consideration.

Rather than perceiving the body as a separate instrument or tool as discussed in the previous section, the performing body could be better likened to an integrated "phenomenal [body]" (Pickard, 2012, p. 34), a subjective body that could be more holistically addressed through self-reflexive practice (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). It is this undivided, more holistic, subjective view of the body that is at the heart of my study. I, therefore, turned my attention to a more phenomenological way of thinking to address wider interpretations of the fleshy body and its role in identity and to embrace epistemological positioning broader than discourse as valid knowledge. I continue to pursue the dancers' occupational identities and how they *feel* and *listen* to their bodies (Aalten, 2007; Pickard, 2012; Tulle, 2015), taking a critical realist stance where knowledge beyond discourse is epistemologically included. I discuss further implications in the Research Methodology, Chapter 5, below.

An aspect of embodiment, in the phenomenological context, is its processing at the non-conscious level (Leder, 1990). This non-conscious processing is best exemplified by the activities undertaken by an individual whilst driving a motor vehicle (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). The number of actions that the individual undertakes non-consciously are all critical in the sensing, coordination, and sequencing of events that bring about the safe operation of the vehicle. It is this ability of the body to function in an absent presence that is addressed in the work of Leder (1990).

Building on the work of Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962), Leder investigates the fact that, while the body is "an inescapable presence in our lives, it is rarely the thematic centre of attention" (Leder, 1990, p. 1). This "absent presence" (Shilling, 2012, p. 12) refers to the fact that, while the body is indeed present in the workplace, it is often under-theorised as an influence on identity (Kasperova and Kitchin, 2014). The body's ability to function beneath the consciousness of the individual frees the person to focus on the greater task at hand whilst carrying out more habitual, or routinised, tasks subliminally. Despite the body's ability to "dys-appear" (hidden but simultaneously present) it remains the object of perception for others – the object-body. It is this experiential interface between the two notions of the body (i.e.: the object body and the individually lived subject body) that requires further consideration (Gilleard, 2022; Lawrence, et al., 2022).

My focus is to specifically understand the idiographic nuanced experience of an occupational identity rather than the aggregated or generalised position for the population (Tomkins and Eatough, 2013). In this regard, Interpretative

Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), is particularly suited to idiographic, experiential, investigations (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009).

IPA's commitment to understanding the individual's unique experiences deploys a case-by-case analysis approach and seeks to capture each individual participant's own interpretation of their experiential world (Nizza, Farr and Smith, 2021). A core principle is the empathetic engagement by the researcher (double hermeneutic) in a process of co-construction of meaning (made from words, tone, emotions, silences, hesitation, gestures, and images) all interpreted in terms of the context (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). The methodological elements related to this research stance are addressed in the Research Methodology (Chapter 5).

In the remainder of this section, I address empirical works relating to lived experience phenomena in respect of individuals engaged in embodied occupations.

3.4.1 What is it like to be you?

I commence this section by addressing research conducted relating to elite artistic gymnasts where IPA was the methodology deployed to examine the individual lived experiences of identity formation and career termination of competitive artistic gymnasts (Lavallee and Robinson, 2007). The methodology deployed and elements of the content align with the body-subject dimension related to identity construction which is relevant to the subject of my study.

There is a significant overlap between artistic gymnasts and ballet dancers (Willard and Lavallee, 2016). Both groups start occupation-specific rigorous training at a young age, have similar societal and occupational demands in terms of bodily aesthetics, and have little or no time to pursue other 'normal' age-appropriate social activities. As a result of this, they sacrifice time and opportunities to explore other interests outside of the occupation which, in turn, has implications for their longer-term self-identity (Marcia, 1980; Lavallee, Grove and Gordon, 1997). Other overlaps include short careers, and a hierarchical organisational culture (e.g.: authoritarian coaches that are obeyed unquestioningly) (Green, 1999; Lavallee and Robinson, 2007; Pickard, 2012).

Specifically seeking to explore those factors that facilitated or hindered self-identity formation and adaptation to retirement in a high-performing athletic environment, Lavallee and Robinson (2007) examined the individual lived experiences of identity formation and career termination of competitive artistic gymnasts using IPA (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). In-depth semi-structured retrospective interviews, incorporating open-ended '*feeling-oriented'* questions (i.e.: *How did it make you feel when….?)* were deployed, facilitating subjective responses. Their study identified a

significant number of similarities amongst the participants, but also nuances that shed additional light on the outcome.

From an identity construction perspective, the participants reported that, above all else, they were always encouraged to think of themselves "as gymnasts" (Lavallee and Robinson, 2007, p. 130), aligning the notion of the organisation requiring them to focus on the idealised body discussed earlier in this chapter.

A further finding of interest, in terms of the body and identity nexus, was bodily aesthetics. Aesthetics, the gymnasts reported, was perceived as requiring them to be "thin, small and graceful" (Lavallee and Robinson, 2007, p. 138). This, they attached very strongly to their self-worth. Similar observations were made of teenage ballet students where empirical evidence showed that, very early in their student years, they were made aware of and accepted, what body shape and size constituted the required body for classical ballet (Pickard, 2013). As observed in the section above addressing the idealised body, being able to maintain that slender body throughout their student years, and professional careers, was understood by ballet dancers as being integral to claiming and embodying a balletic identity (Pickard, 2013). The lived experience of adolescent body changes however, and possible weight gain risks, made the gymnasts feel very vulnerable during, and after, their careers (Lavallee and Robinson, 2007). Consequently, the gymnasts reported having long-lasting concerns about their body size which had a negative impact on their post-retirement self-identity.

All of the gymnast participants stressed how the gymnastics setting had imposed on them an *achievement* culture. As a result, they always felt that they had to strive for excellence and were driven towards the need to continually advance and improve their capabilities in pursuit of idealised outcomes (Lavallee and Robinson, 2007). The outflow of this behaviour was the development of perfectionism and overly critical tendencies (Nordin-Bates and Kuylser, 2021). These, in turn, left the gymnasts feeling constantly inadequate and dependent on doing everything correctly all the time in order to please those in authority (Lavallee and Robinson, 2007). Furthermore, those gymnasts who felt the pressures to achieve excellence at all costs during their careers, tried to find a meaningful replacement identity but that proved a challenge, in most cases, lasting a lifetime.

Particularly during the latter part of the gymnastic career phase, coaches were reported to totally avoid broaching the subject of retirement so as to retain the gymnasts for as long as they were physically capable. Ignoring age and avoiding any discussion simultaneously negated distraction from training and preparation for competition (Lavallee and Robinson, 2007). The implications of this behaviour by the coaches are that it discourages and limits experimentation and hinders appropriate decision-making

in respect of post-gymnastic careers. While retirement from the occupation was generally a traumatic and disorientating process for the gymnasts, Lavallee and Robinson (2007) identified that those that had undertaken planning in preparation for retirement encountered a more positive process and outcome. They were able to move beyond their athletic careers and identities with comparatively greater ease.

In line with the Lavallee and Robinson (2007) study, Willard and Lavallee (2016) reported a material overlap between the elite gymnasts and professional ballet dancers, particularly regarding the degree of exclusive "athletic identity" (Brewer, Van Raalte and Linder,1993, p. 239). This is where the individual's self-identity is derived solely from their athletic/occupational role. The authors observed that the deep enmeshment of their participants' personal identities with their occupational identities during their careers was particularly problematic at the point of retirement for both groups. Roncaglia (2010) made similar observations in her study of career-transitioned ballet dancers.

With the substantial influence of vocational training prevailing for both gymnasts and ballet dancers, similar "strong and exclusive identities" were observed to have developed (Willard and Lavallee, 2016, p. 268). To their participants, ballet was more than a job – it was their life that ranked ahead of any other considerations. Predictably then, at retirement, they experienced irreplaceable identity loss, and confusion in their lives (Willard and Lavallee, 2016).

A further similarity with the findings of these two studies is the impact of the imbalance in power between the ballet dancers (and the artistic gymnasts) with their respective ballet management/gym coaches. It was the distinct lack of agency (e.g.: casting inclusion or exclusion; de-selection; rejection; being ignored; treated as a tool or commodity) that both groups experienced during their active careers that had a negative impact on the quality of their retirement process. Recollections of bitterness and anger prevailed well into retirement. An added complication for both groups, albeit a decade or more apart, was ageing. While in both groups it was not the overriding determinant for retirement, it did have a bearing. From an ageing perspective, what was more pronounced was 'functional age' – their ability to perform their task/craft (Kooij, et al., 2008; De Lange, et al., 2021). I address ageing more fully in a later section of this chapter.

Factors affecting both groups that had a bearing on their retirement experiences were their strong identification with their occupational identities, emanating from their sense of *calling* or commitment to their craft (Wacquant 1995; Wrzesniewski, et al., 1997; Wainwright, Williams and Turner, 2005). The sacrifices that both groups made to pursue their careers were wide-ranging but could be summarised as having a lasting impact on career planning and broader social implications. A unidirectional focus on their

occupational identity seems to be most detrimental for their long-term self-worth for both groups (Kim, Tasker and Shen, 2020). Their arduous early life phase training regimes, the domineering behaviour of management, and the limited agency that both groups experienced throughout their careers had a compounding impact on their retirement experiences, on their bodies, and ultimately their long-term identities (Lavallee and Robinson, 2007; Willard and Lavallee, 2016). A perceived limitation of these studies is that they constituted small sample sizes, a narrow focus on a specialist occupation, and the specific nature of the individualised experiences. These constrain generalisability aspects on the one hand, but provide additional perspectives that, in turn, could lead to larger scale future studies.

An emerging stream of research in OS is indicative of the recognition of the role that the material body plays in identity construction at work, laying the ground for further investigation in this field (e.g.: van Amsterdam and van Eck, 2019; Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2021; Lawrence, et al., 2022). In this regard, the notion of pain has received significant attention in dance, and sports & exercise research. It is the presence of the materiality of body in these occupations, and how that shapes their lived experience and occupational identity, that has relevance to my study. In the following section, I address the role of 'bad pain' and its influence on occupational identity.

3.4.2 Bad Pain

Pain transcends the Cartesian dualism of the body and manifests as a lived experience known only to the individual (Wainwright and Turner, 2003). As shown earlier, 'good' pain is that pain that is experienced in the process of training and extending the physical body's range, flexibility, endurance, and skill in order to give effect to an activity or a task (McNarry, Allen-Collinson and Evans, 2020; Bluhm and Ravn, 2022). 'Bad' pain, on the other hand, is that pain associated with injury where, for example, the individual experiences sharp shooting pain or acute pain resulting in the need to suddenly discontinue the activity (Tarr and Thomas, 2020). The boundary between 'good' and 'bad' pain is often blurred since the symptoms of particularly milder injuries can easily be confused with those aches and cramps associated with athletic development (McNarry, Allen-Collinson and Evans, 2020; Tarr and Thomas, 2020).

A significant contribution that Wainwright and Turner made, at the time, through the various iterations (2003, 2004, 2006) of their articles based on their primary study, is the incorporation of the *body of flesh and blood* into the sociology of health and illness. Their studies specifically sought to address pain, injury, and ageing of professional ballet dancers by conducting an ethnography, centred on the Royal Ballet, London. Their

motive for selecting ballet dancers for the study was that the dancer's task is carried out and communicated through the medium of mime and body language, without of the use of the spoken word, rendering the ballet dancer more aware of the body, its movements and means of communication (Wainwright and Turner, 2003). Owing to their deep investment and commitment to their performing bodies, any injury that disrupts the dancer's activities is seen in a similar light to traumatic or chronic illness (Turner and Wainwright, 2003). These characteristics, Turner and Wainwright argued, make the case for considering the Bourdieusian approach that accommodates ontological and epistemological concepts beyond discourse. By so doing, they overcome the mind-body divide limitation inherent in the prevailing social constructionist paradigm (Shilling, 2012).

Dancers and professional athletes have been known to continue working whilst in chronic pain and injury (Mainwaring, Krasnow and Kerr, 2001; Aalten, 2004, 2005, 2007; Wainwright and Turner, 2004, Roderick, 2006; McNarry, Allen-Collinson and Evans, 2020; Bluhm and Ravn, 2022). Focusing on injury in their first article, Turner and Wainwright (2003) turned their attention to the body as *lived and experienced* rather than as *text*. Some of their participants reported not being willing to seek medical attention and continued to dance with injuries despite the likely catastrophic outcome or potential long-term implications. There exists a moral code amongst dancers whereby continuing to work whilst injured is valorised as representing hard work and commitment (Wulff, 1998). A compounding factor is the dancers' fear is that if they were to depart the stage, they would have to re-define themselves with its concomitant implications for identity construction (Manor, 2017). Given the closeness of the dancers' relationships in the corps de ballet, and the social and organisational pressures within the ballet context, they experienced intense and demanding pressures that made it impossible at times for them to refuse to dance on an injury (Turner and Wainwright, 2003). They felt that they would be letting their colleagues down.

Adopting a phenomenological approach Tarr and Thomas (2020), investigated how differently dancers from various genres and associated professionals experienced how good pain *feels* from bad pain. Pain and injuries related to dance activities were observed to often accrue over time and, therefore, the difference between bad pain and injury can be misconstrued for the daily pain encountered with exercise and fitness (Tarr and Thomas, 2020). Members of the contemporary dance cohort did, in certain instances, develop greater bodily awareness through training and then displayed greater ability to listen to and feel their bodies, developing the ability to distinguish 'good' pain from 'bad' pain. This, however, was not evident across all genres and cohorts.

'Bad' pain was described by respondents in a study of professional dancers to be that experience where injury was distracting and uncomfortable. In an international

setting studying 20 dancers in a pilot study, the perceptions of pain were explored (Harrison and Ruddock-Hudson, 2017). In this study, 'bad' pain was generally perceived to be long-term in nature and was associated with negative emotions generally because it impaired their ability to progress in their careers (Harrison and Ruddock-Hudson, 2017). Describing the experience of 'bad' pain, the dancers cited sharp pains that felt wrong and were unmanageable, generally requiring medical treatment. However, from a psychological perspective, the dancers generally refused to yield to the experience of pain and would continue to work until it reached catastrophic levels, ultimately preventing them from continuing to dance. The socially constructed discursive interpretation of pain, reframed by the ballet sub-culture as positive and therefore valorised, masks and overrides the body's material signals (Orlikowski and Scott, 2015). In some instances, dancers wished that the pain would escalate more quickly so that it would reach the point where, in terms of the social contract with their colleagues, they would be justified in seeking treatment (Harrison and Ruddock-Hudson, 2017).

These studies depict the blurred and confused experience relating to the positive effect and impact of 'good' pain and the inability to recognise and distinguish that from detrimental 'bad' pain that leads to injury. It is the organisational influence, training and experience that inculcates into the dancer the ability to withstand high thresholds of pain that when unmanaged, can have career changing effect (Tajet-Foxell and Rose, 1995; Mainwaring, Krasnow and Kerr, 2001; Aalten, 2007). Non-dancers routinely experience the non-conscious, disappearance of their bodies (e.g.: when they go to work, eat a sandwich, take a bus, etc.) (Aalten, 2005). They carry out daily activities oblivious to bodily presence and functioning which literally takes place in the background. Ballet dancers, by contrast, develop an enhanced awareness of their bodies (Rodrigues, et al., 2020) and it is only by them actively concealing their bodies from themselves that they achieve temporary "dys-appearing"/silencing that they seek of their bodies and for it to function non-consciously in the background (Leder, 1990, p. 69). Through active self-suggestion, cultural conditioning, and peer congruence noted above, dancers developed the ability to discursively silence the presence of pain (Aalten, 2005).

The practice of professional ballet goes against the very design of the human body (Aalten, 2007). Aalten points out that the impact on the body is exacerbated, not only by these extreme physical requirements and the associated ballet technique, but it is also compounded by ballet's occupational culture – an observation echoed by Vincent (1979; 1989). Indeed, the root problem is related to the slender bodily aesthetic demanded by the occupation, an issue that is neither scientific nor medical in nature, but an aspect that the ballet world itself is reluctant to confront (Vincent, 1989). It is not only the eating disorders related to slenderness demands, but an equally hazardous attitude

that exists towards pain and injuries that is so damaging to the dancers' health (Turner and Wainwright, 2003; Aalten, 2007; Dryburgh and Fortin, 2010; Tarr and Thomas, 2020).

In an endeavour to understand this phenomenon better, Aalten (2007) turned her attention to the moral beliefs surrounding the dancers' normalisation of eating disorders, exhaustion, pain, and injury. She observed that dancers' reason that, if they want to be good at their task, they have to live by the adage: "blood is good, no pain no gain" (Aalten, 2007, p. 116). This disposition, inculcated from a young age, amounts to currency for the dancers where they trade their artistic capital for success (Pickard, 2012). Within the ballet sub-culture, dancers are taught to 'pretend' that they are not experiencing pain and are conditioned to not think about it (Alexias and Dimitropoulou, 2011). Morally, Aalten noted from her data that the ballet sub-culture influences dancers to ignore "the language of the body" in respect of pain and to silence it (Aalten, 2007, p. 119; Pickard, 2015). By so doing, the culture is of itself a key protagonist in the ballet dancer's self-inflicted undoing of the body (Mainwaring, Krasnow, Kerr, 2001; Nordin-Bates, et al., 2011). Injuries, in this context therefore, become prized (Aalten, 2007). Having 'silenced' the body's pain, the dancer only becomes aware that they are overdoing the boundaries of their body's capabilities when they incur a debilitating injury (Wainwright, Williams and Turner, 2005; Aalten, 2007). This active silencing of the body's pain has an impact on wear, tear and injury that goes unchecked (Mainwaring, Krasnow, Kerr, 2001; Vassallo, et al., 2019). Ultimately, left sufficiently unattended, the functionality of the body becomes impaired. This can result in premature physical capital erosion – which stated otherwise is occupational functional ageing (Kooij, et al., 2008; De Lange, et al., 2021).

3.4.3 Old at 25…

In the preceding sections I addressed age as it relates to aspiration (section 3.2.7 – '*Forever Young'),* and in section 3.3.3 – '*Age at Work'* as it relates to organising at work. In this final section on age, I address age as it relates to the lived experience of the individual. This section came about iteratively as a result of observations gleaned from my study's data. I returned to the literature to investigate those aspects as they relate to how the individual subjectively experiences age.

"*Eric…a youthful 25 years of age is still getting old for a dancer…What I've noticed, even at 24, 25, is that I can still do anything I always could but just not as easily….*" (Wainwright and Williams, 2005, p. 522).

This excerpt from Wainwright's (2000) ethnographic study of the Royal Ballet, London, is indicative of the impact of physical (biological) ageing on the body of a ballet

dancer. Yet, in the context of ballet in Continental Europe (e.g., Dutch National Ballet, Paris Opera Ballet, Norwegian National Ballet, Royal Swedish Ballet), chronological age remains a pre-determinant for retirement regardless of whether the dancer can continue to perform or not in line with mainstream organising patterns, albeit at a younger chronological age (Wulff, 2001; Aalten, 2005; EuroFIA, 2011; Young, 2019; Rustaad and Engelsrud, 2022). The inescapable temporality of the human body is already manifest at a youthful age that characterises the lived experience of high performing ballet dancers (Wainwright and Williams, 2005). Ballet dancers in the UK are organised more in terms of their ability to carry out the task, independent of their chronological age, whilst in the mainstream, employees have been stereotypically categorised according to their chronological age number (Beier, et al., 2022). In recent times, however, chronological age has been shown to be a somewhat "inexact proxy" for predicting biological age changes (Beier, et al., 2022, p. 780).

Ballet dancers' bodies, as seen with other high-performance occupations, are a combination of their occupational history and accumulation of occupational experience (Riach and Cutcher, 2014). Still in their chronological prime, however, ballet dancers are faced with the prospect of their dancing careers coming to an end as a result of biological ageing and its consequences (Grosz, 2004). Yet others experience the sudden termination of their careers even earlier due to catastrophic injury. Their future is abruptly informed, not by the inevitable, but instead by the requirement for reinvention of their occupational identity (Maitlis, 2022). Because of the enormity of the impact on the future of ballet dancers' identity beyond ballet, they are left having to grapple with the known unknown (not fully thought through) implications and having to script their futures largely through experimentation (Jack, Riach and Bariola, 2019).

Further, within the UK ballet context, chronological age was seen to be but *one* of a number of contributing factors influencing the retirement decision-making for both individual dancers and organisations (Roncaglia, 2006, 2007, 2010; Wainwright and Turner, 2003, 2006; Willard and Lavallee, 2016). Extending the balletic treatment of age(ing) to the mainstream, this could be re-conceptualised through "elaboration and invention" (Grosz, 2004, p. 157). For example, the experience of 'lived' time for a woman undergoing a significant life event (i.e.: maternity, menopause) can be rather divergent from someone else's linear 'chrononormative' time. This is where 'lived' time could be construed to stretch, shrink, or bifurcate according to the circumstances surrounding each individual case (Jack, Riach and Bariola, 2019). Examples in the ballet world reflect that self-perception of performance and aesthetics, and organisational behaviour around casting, deselection, and subtle hints from ballet staff, all influence the dancers' retirement decisions (Roncaglia, 2007). This non-linear notion of age, in the ballet

context, was also used by management to emphasise perceived 'youthfulness', and its concomitant physical prowess (Roncaglia, 2006; Southcott and Joseph, 2019; Rustad and Engelsrud, 2022).

Very few dancers have the opportunity, after career transitioning, to remain within the ballet milieu. Few are given the opportunity to exchange their balletic knowledge and experience for social and economic gain (e.g.: as teachers, coaches, artistic administrators) (Wainwright and Turner, 2006). Ballet steps and movement memory, however, remain imprinted into the dancers' muscles long after career transitioning which leaves them in a perpetual state of limbo (Willard and Lavallee, 2016). A poignant analogy was drawn by 36-year-old Alice Topp, a former principal ballerina with The Australian Ballet, to explain in a rather carnal, vivid way, how she experienced age(ing) and the loss of her balletic identity. During an interview with Miller (2021), Topp described dance as being an "extension of [her]self, it's a phantom limb" - which had been taken from her upon retirement from the stage. Her association with the "phantom limb" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 88) is significant for identity construction because this is where the limb continues to be *felt* despite its amputation from the body.

Having been distanced from their physical activities, community, and context, dancers retain embodied memory of their former selves that, even when engaged in alternative careers, their balletic identity remains with them (Obodaru, 2017). Explaining how this identity loss felt to her at a time when her body's capabilities were in decline, but her artistry was still in the ascendancy, Topp explained that it felt like "a guillotine had cut through her self-image" (Miller, 2021, np.). Physical decline or occupational age(ing) thus had a material impact on her self-perception. Now, no longer part of an elite ballet company but with a lingering notion of her balletic identity seeking an outlet, Topp and other retired dancers established a dance company to provide an opportunity for their self-expression and continued engagement with the artform (Obodaru, 2017). Ballet dancers not only lose their social status, income, and careers, but simultaneously lose their identity and sense of being (Willard and Lavallee, 2016). This has implications for how ballet dancers will interpret their age(ing). There remains thus a paucity of research that explores how the individual dancer lives and experiences age(ing) during their active career phases. The notion of ageing within the bounds of a youth-venerating occupation takes the discussion of age further.

Ballet dancers tend to be peaking at a younger age than their predecessors in current times, despite their higher level of fitness (Wainwright and Turner, 2006). This could be attributable to the increasing athletic demands inherent in contemporary choreography, and the combination of classical ballet and contemporary dance having to be performed concurrently (Wainwright and Turner, 2006). Active dancers, still in their

20s, reported how they *felt* their bodies 'tightening up' which concerned them for the longevity of their careers and made them more aware of the fragility and ageing of their bodies (Wainwright and Turner, 2006). The inescapable presence of the material body, and its inherent ageing, are factors that have a significant impact on the individual's identity construction that differs depending on the individual's circumstances (Wainwright and Turner, 2006). How the individual experiences age(ing) is therefore of consequence.

Framing age(ing) as positive and an ongoing experience, rather than an event delineating the individual from their past, Riach and Cutcher (2014) highlighted how masculine norms were reproduced within the organisational culture. Framing defined how individuals negotiated the process of ageing at work in a hedge fund in the City of London. Aligning with Bourdieu's concept of the habitus, Riach and Cutcher's (2014) paper contributed to a greater understanding that ageing is not an old age occurrence that suddenly develops, but is instead a continuous process commencing at birth. The hedge fund traders reported feeling young but displayed natural ageing aesthetics that then had to be countered to fit in with the youth-venerating expectations of the organisation. Thus the "visible body masks the unseen self" (Bytheway and Johnson, 2007, para. 2.). A parallel could be drawn with the "mask of ageing" (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1991, p. 382) differentiating between the visible image of the body and how the individual feels about their body. This perception by the individual is further exemplified in a large empirical study undertaken in Germany where subjective age (i.e.: the age that an individual perceives themselves to be) was shown to be a more reliable indicator of social integration at work than chronological age (Kunze, Boehm and Bruch, 2021). However, while experiencing burgeoning interest in areas such as gerontology, few in OS have focused on subjective age as a primary consideration (Kunze, Boehm and Bruch, 2021).

Returning to the Sterns and Doverspike (1989) model, and the complex notion of age, there have been a number of iterative revisions that need to be taken into account when considering age in its wider context. Firstly, Cleveland and Shore (1992) suggested separating person-based age measures (i.e.: chronological age, functional age, and subjective age) from context-based age measures (i.e.: organisational age and social age). McCarthy, et al. (2014) further refined organisational age to incorporate sub-groupings including organisational age norms, industry age norms, tenure age, career stage, retirement planning age. They also incorporated an extension to the notion of functional age to include physical age and age appearance as factors for consideration (McCarthy, et al., 2014). Finally, the Sterns and Doverspike model could also be extended to include the notion of generational age (Pitt-Catsouphes, et al., 2010).

Amongst the above notions of age are those aspects that take into account the temporality of the experience of age(ing) at different stages through the life course of the individual (Jack, Riach and Bariola, 2019; Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2021). How age(ing) is experienced over the course of my participants' careers is of interest in my study. I argue that, in addition to the complex notion of age, the feminist notion of the 'body politics of surprise' (Jack, Riach and Bariola, 2019) is relevant in the ballet context. It is its related notion of Bergsonian time differentials (Grosz, 2005), together with the notion of age as an element of 'bodily accumulation' (Riach and Cutcher, 2014), that need to be considered. Having said that, it may not be possible for all of these conceptualisations to be deployed to every aspect of age(ing) in the workplace, but these diverse sets of conceptualisations could be selectively deployed more fittingly.

In my study, therefore, I seek to further explore the notion of subjective age(ing) by the individual as seen specifically from their perspective as opposed to being seen by the organisation. Exploring with a specific phenomenological lens *what it feels like* to undergo career transitioning from the individual perspective of the ballet dancers' themselves constitutes such a specific subjective approach (Roncaglia, 2007). The potential for greater knowledge and understanding of the impact of age(ing) within younger working-age groups remain unfulfilled (Ainsworth, 2020) and, since ballet dancers are predominantly youthful, they provide a fruitful opportunity to explore age(ing) within younger age groups at work.

3.5 Rationale for the Study

My study seeks to explore how professional ballet dancers experience their embodied occupational identity. In the process, I address the body's role in identity construction. In so doing, I narrowed my focus from the broader occupational identity realm to concentrate on embodied occupational identity in an occupation where the body is at the centre of the task. I selected professional ballet dancers who have an enhanced awareness of their bodies, and who have had professional dancing experience in the UK at one of the five elite ballet companies.

A nuanced aspect of occupational identity, particularly as it relates to the body is the notion of age(ing) at work. This aspect I have found to be under-researched in the field of OS and therefore singled it out for specific attention. This constitutes RQ2 of my study (Ainsworth, 2020). In this section, I deal with the rationale for both of these aspects:

3.5.1 Research Questions

My overall research questions address individual lived experiences of occupational identities:

RQ1: How do professional ballet dancers experience their embodied occupational identities?

RQ2: How does ageing influence the lived experience of being a professional ballet dancer?

3.5.2 Rationale for the Subject-Body – RQ1

This rationale outlines the contribution that the subject-body makes in relation to how the body is lived. I address this by relating the philosophical approaches to the three notions of the body (e.g.: idealised, object, and subject notions) and address their associated limitations. My observations are supported by reference to empirical studies reviewed in the chapter above and address the linkage between the theoretical underpinning, and the approaches deployed by scholars in the three broad areas discussed.

I firstly addressed the "idealised body" which is analogous to individual aspiration in relation to a desired occupation (Foster, 1997, p. 237). Salient aspects relating to the role of the idealised body include the aspirational implications of complying aesthetic and attributable characteristics; coping with the demands of the greedy organisation and the individual sacrifices motivated by calling and passion. The idealised body serves as a means for organisations to encourage, influence, and even coerce individuals into complicity in order to gain access to and benefit from membership of their occupation (Warhurst, et al., 2000; Witz, Warhurst and Nickson, 2017). In the past, the predominance of studies within the realm of OS have focused on the notions of discourses of power, discipline, and surveillance that organisations deploy in their policies, procedures, practices, and communications in order to motivate and manage employees (Shilling, 2012). The social constructionist approaches are vested in the mind privileged Cartesian philosophy where the body is apprehended as subservient and docile (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2021).

These approaches have contributed widely to the understanding of the organisation/individual interrelationship and contain elements that would allude to cause-and-effect outcomes. The foundation of the Foucauldian theoretical approach is vested in the hierarchical organisational context prevailing in the 20th Century and is well-suited

to highly organised and categorised scenarios such as large multinationals, the military, and certainly sports, and performing arts scenarios such as ballet (Foucault, 1977).

The limitations of the constructionist approaches, however, include the reductionist epistemology where it recognises discourse as its only basis for knowledge. Knowledge beyond discourse remains unappreciated (Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2021; Lawrence, et al., 2022). From an embodied identity perspective, sensations, and non-verbal cues, were excluded from consideration. The body, therefore in this context, is never experienced (Styhre, 2004).

Turning to the lived experience of the individual, OS scholars embraced the Bourdieusian framework which facilitated an understanding of the process and operationalised the circular interrelationship between organisation/society and the individual (Crossley, 2001). From a lived body perspective, the Bourdieusian conceptual framework provided a mechanism for the incorporation of the body into the process of identity construction by depicting the means (the habitus) through which the individual accumulates and sediments dispositions, competencies, and skills into the body (Bourdieu, 1990). This conceptual framework acknowledges the potential for the individual to construct and enact multiple identities simultaneously and provides a mechanism to address the interrelationship focusing on one of multiple possible fields (Riach and Cutcher, 2014). Capital, and in particular physical capital that is of interest in my study, is shown through the Bourdieusian framework to convert sedimented competencies and skills into other forms of capital (e.g.: cultural, and economic) that it then exchanges with the organisation or society (Pickard, 2012, 2013; van Amsterdam, Claringbould and Knoppers, 2017). An important consideration is that the Bourdieusian approach overcomes the Cartesian mind/body divide and eliminates the subordination of the absent present body as an inert entity (Shilling, 2003, 2012; Lawrence, et al., 2022). The inclusion of individual agency and physical capital were aspects that were shown to be contributory elements emanating from the body in identity construction.

Both the constructivist and the social constructionist approaches addressed above share the limitation that the lived experience, sensations, and feelings, of the individual are largely under-represented in their approaches (van Amsterdam, van Eck and Kjaer, 2022). Both the Foucauldian and Bourdieusian approaches remain reductionist in their epistemological stances with discourse remaining prominent. The locus of agency, whilst allowing for limited scope for individual intervention, remains vested in society/the organisation (Wolkowitz, 2006; Evans, Whiting and Mackenzie Davey, 2020).

Pursuing the objective of seeking to understand the subjective nuanced individual account of professional ballet dancers, I explored phenomenologically informed

empirical works. Phenomenological methods, whilst varying widely in approach, are generally ontologically more inclined to accommodate wider considerations beyond the epistemological constraint limited to discourse (Gill, 2020). It therefore facilitates the inclusion of richer data incorporating the interpretation of feelings, sensations, and emotions experienced and depicted beyond the analysis of text (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

Therefore, studies deploying IPA were particularly fitting to elucidate individual nuances in addition to convergences and divergencies in accounts (Nizza, Farr and Smith, 2021). The in-depth individualised case study approach gave voice to the individual participant, and simultaneously provided the researcher with the opportunity to explore more deeply those individual experiences (Lavallee and Robinson, 2007). There are other methodological considerations that favour the idiographic approach enshrined in IPA but are also constitutive of considerations to be borne in mind. These are addressed in more detail in the Research Methodology chapter that follows.

With this in mind, I returned to review the literature to explore more fully past OS studies addressing the role of the subject-body in identify construction. I sought to explore empirical works addressing the organisational/individual interrelationship taking the *individual's* subjective perspective to embodied occupational identity construction. However, I found a dearth of studies in OS. Accordingly, I explored adjacent fields and incorporated relevant empirical works.

From these works I concluded that a focus on the existential lived experience, ensconced in the subject-body, provided a more fitting approach. It addressed how, through the medium of the experienced body, the individual ballet dancer lived and felt their embodied occupational identity (Roncaglia, 2007).

3.5.3 Rationale for Age(ing) – RQ 2

The rationale for addressing age(ing) separately emanates from it having been under-researched in relation to other embodied characteristic that relate to identity (Thomas, et al., 2014; Ainsworth, 2020). Age(ing) is an embodied characteristic that we will all encounter in our lifetime, and it plays a determining role in our careers (Cutcher. Riach and Tyler, 2022).

My study specifically looks at an embodied occupation and the influences of the body in identity construction. Age plays a role in each of the three notions of the body as addressed in my analysis, but differentially. For example, in relation to the 'idealised body', age is a visual marker (Tulle, 2015) that plays a significant role, and is fundamental to the temporality of the body from time to time (Jack, Riach and Bariola, 2019).

Organisations, therefore, have a vested interested in the aesthetic aspects of age as it relates to the understanding of the role of the body in relation to their brand (Johansson, Tienary and Valtonen, 2017).

From a work perspective, age plays a role in the 'vampiric' practices of the organisation. It is *that* finite utility, that is temporal in nature, and ultimately the determinant in the employee's fate (Riach and Kelly, 2015). Age(ing) has, in the past, been narrowly addressed in the field of ballet but predominantly as it intersects with other characteristics (e.g.: Wainwright and Turner, 2003, 2006; Aalten, 2005; Roncaglia, 2006, 2007, 2010, Willard and Lavallee, 2016, and Rodrigues, Cunha, Castanheira, et al., 2020). To date though, there has been a paucity of studies addressing the lived experience of age(ing) by active professional ballet dancers.

Further, in respect of 'age at work', it transpires that it is both a statutory and ubiquitous organising instrument in the workplace (De Lange, et al., 2021). Founded predominantly in the notion of chronology, age has generally been related to those latter decline year of employment. The literature has tended to focus mostly on the post-retirement phase and related to geriatric decline with its associated stereotypes (Loch, et al., 2010; Kooij, et al., 2011; Ng and Feldman, 2012, Ng, 2021). Despite its statutory status, age at work remains a confused characteristic in defining who is old at work (McCarthy, et al., 2014). Authors have thus concluded that the notion of chronological age is too reductionist in nature to be of much value in addressing the consequences and implications for both the organisation and the individual (Gilleard and Higgs, 2013; Thomas, et al., 2014).

In recent times, efforts have been made to address the body more holistically beyond discursive foci (Knights and Clarke, 2017; Courpasson and Monties, 2017; Sergeeva, Faraj and Hyusman, 2020; Pouthier and Sondak, 2021; Lawrence, et al., 2022). Consequently, since age is an inextricable marker related to the body, it too needs to be explored beyond those foci. Being conceptualised as having multi-dimensional facets (Riach and Cutcher, 2014; De Lange, et al., 2021), age in the organisational context has more recently extended earlier works (e.g.: Sterns & Doverspike, 1989) bringing into focus those interpretations of age that support organisational decision-makers more fully (McCarthy, et al., 2014). Further factors such as biological, social, environmental and normative work conceptualisations have taken more prominence over chronological age and relate to the notion of the object-body (Beier, et al., 2022).

Moreover, age has been conceptualised through a feminist lens and found to be significantly divergent from linear chrononormative time (Jack, Riach and Bariola, 2019). These studies have sought to redress this linearity enshrined in the prevailing work practices. Empirical research has developed surrounding the notion of non-linear

Bergsonian time (Jack, Riach and Bariola, 2019) building on the work of Grosz (1994) and Butler (2004), making a case for the un/doing of the linear notion of organising at work. These approaches potentially make way for greater diversity to inform policies, procedures and values (Riach, Rumens and Tyler, 2014). Contemporary works in OS have started to explore age in relation to people of normal working age (i.e.: pre-retirement planning age) (e.g.: Riach, Rumens and Tyler, 2014; Riach and Cutcher, 2014; Foweraker and Cutcher, 2015; Jack, Riach and Bariola, 2019; Ozturk, Rumens and Tatli, 2020; Cutcher, Riach and Tyler, 2022).

Those studies focusing more specifically in youth-venerating occupations, such as ballet, found that biological ageing had a significant role to play, influencing the individual's ability to (not) perform their task beyond a certain point (Wainwright and Williams, 2005). However, despite the development of the significant field of conceptualisations of age at work, age(ing) remains under-researched in OS (Thomas, et al., 2014; Ainsworth, 2020; Kunze, Boehm and Bruch, 2021). There is thus a case to be made for further research into how individuals experience ageing, through the notion of the subject body, in relation to their occupation.

4 Chapter 4: My Reflexive Journey

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I address how my background, fore-understandings, and preconceptions influenced my study in the context of iterative deployment of reflexivity throughout my doctoral research journey. I address the implications of having had a background in professional ballet for my research, followed by considerations relating to my human resources career in the banking sector where I recognised a mirroring of contextual and cultural experiences. This led me to evaluate my ability to do justice to my participants accounts sharing extracts from annotated transcript analyses, intruding fore-understandings and preconceptions which could have influenced the analysis process and my meaning-making differently had I not attended to them.

This doctoral journey tested my resilience, grit, perseverance and determination to complete this project against a number of odds that occurred along the way. From having to deal with cancer in my very close family (recovered), giving up employment twice to complete this journey, my own health having taken a protracted time to recover part-way through, the impact of the Covid pandemic lockdowns and ensuing isolation, supervisory changes and, to crown it all, in the final stretch I had to face a Covid-19 infection myself and an unprecedented heatwave in the UK where the temperature in London reached 40°C. This chapter was drafted iteratively and updated regularly throughout the duration of my thesis, a process that was both difficult to write but also cathartic in its contribution to my learning.

4.2 Motivation for Reflexive Practice

Writing a reflexivity chapter is a personal endeavour where my role and focus switches from being the observer to being the observed. This is challenging for a variety of reasons. Firstly, this is a critical introspection into my own circumstances, feelings and thoughts, social and personal history, and engagement in the research process (Whiting, et al., 2018). It makes me feel vulnerable. This feels tantamount to having an intruder in my own home scratching through my very personal possessions but with the added advantage of a very personal knowledge of everything. I recognise though that it is a record of the processes I went through and serves to elucidate my positioning, but also my experiences, which particularly informed the interviews, analysis, and discussions.

Research by its very nature is a process of exploring the unknown and the pathway to new knowledge is uncertain. Qualitative research takes place in an iterative spiral format that, along the way can lead one way or another, up dead-end streets and

back, until new knowledge crystalises from the process before the researcher achieves her goals (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

As is common with most topics in the social sciences, reflexivity has been defined in a number of ways, dependent upon the ontological and epistemological underpinning and philosophical positioning of the researcher (Finlay, 2002; Cunliffe, 2003; Shaw, 2010). Common amongst these interpretations is the recognition that we are social beings and that our understanding of our experiences is contextual. Experiential studies require transparency in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the results (Shaw, 2010) which required reflexive disposition.

The role of the embodied experience of the qualitative researcher is widely acknowledged (Gilbert, 2001; Haynes, 2006; Johnson, 2009). Given how the researcher engages with their participants' lives, the possible entwinement of experiences, and how that may influence the co-construction of meaning within an IPA study, researcher's self-awareness of how their own lives and experiences will influence the study plays an important quality assurance role (Spiers, Smith and Drage, 2015). Therefore, it stands to reason that from the outset, the researcher's prior position, history, and knowledge will have an influence on her point of departure, at least and most likely upon the ensuing process, until finality is reached (Heidegger, 1962). The research process, and its participants, will also unavoidably influence the researcher.

A careful distinction needs to be drawn between reflection and reflexivity. For the purposes of my study, I recognise the notion of the existence of a continuum between *reflection* at the one end, and *reflexivity* at the other (Woolgar, 1998). I posit that reflection is a necessary precursor to reflexive practice where 'factual' positioning (as far as practically possible) establishes a positivist version of the participants' accounts. At the other end of the continuum, reflexivity represents the process of explicit self-evaluation that helps inform the outcome of the co-constitution of meaning (Shaw, 2010). In effect, through the reflexive process the spotlight is turned introspectively on the researcher by the researcher (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000).

Reflexive positioning occurs when the researcher recognises the subjective and fluid nature of her own positioning relative to that of her participants so that she is able to adjust her lens sufficiently to distinguish her interpretation from theirs. This prompted the question as to where the boundaries between research and reflexion begin and end. I posit that reflexivity is an 'attitude' and that the process of reflexivity takes place iteratively within the mainstream research process. The researcher needs to understand that the entwinement of these two parallel processes is time-consuming but integral to the qualitative research process (Engward and Goldspink, 2020).

It is through the process of engaging in reflexive practice that the researcher is able to position herself in relation to the research, and the researched, and to endeavour to better understand her own position, feelings, expectations, and thinking and then to distinguish them as far as possible from the researched accounts. Reflexivity thus provides a mechanism to evaluate the tension between engagement and detachment, between the researcher and researched, with a view to enhancing the rigor and ethical position in relation to the study (Berger, 2015). The role of the researcher is thus recognised and appreciated in the process of co-construction of meaning, particularly in the in-depth, idiographic, context of IPA (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

Reflexivity, however, has its limitations and detractors (Etherington, 2004). Even the most forthcoming of researchers will prefer to keep her most vulnerable spots hidden (Gemignani, 2011). However, the courageous researcher, determined to address these sensitivities will find accessing those areas to be no mean feat. Exposing vulnerabilities, limitations, pre-conceptions, and fore-understandings is not a comfortable task. Reflexivity is not, after all, a magic potion that will resolve the 'problem' of subjectivity (Pillow, 2003), improve the quality of the research or render it more valuable (Probst, 2015).

I posit however that, despite its subjective limitations, by adopting a reflexive stance to qualitative research and making explicit fore-understandings, and preconceptions, the resultant outcome delivers a deeper, broader tapestry that delineates my participants' accounts from my own. A further challenge was that I had to remain aware, at all times, that reflexive practice has a tendency to "disrupt the subject-object, and the observer-object distinctions" that prevail in the qualitative research process, and to guard against the negative implications of this in the analysis process (Bryman and Cassell, 2006, p. 46).

Therefore, this chapter endeavours to specifically address those aspects of my account that impinged upon the research process and my participants' meaning-making (Dickson-Swift, 2007, 2009).

4.3 Who am I?

I am a doctoral researcher with a background in human resources management within the financial services industry in the City of London. I am female, middle aged, and Caucasian with a prior background as a professional ballet dancer in the UK. Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, I moved to London, England, aged 17 to finish my vocational ballet training at an elite ballet school, after which, I was employed at a London-based elite ballet company.

Ballet is an emotive topic for me. It was 'home' to me from a young age and, as such, it had given me a sense of who I was, meaning, and purpose to my life. The ballet bubble represented 'family' to me, including its camaraderie and closeness but also its drama and toxicity elements, just like any other family. This was all lost within a split second as a result of a career-ending injury. Suddenly, I went from being a fully-fledged and emerging ballet dancer to someone who had to crawl upstairs and drag herself down the steps sitting on her bottom. I lost my mobility, my livelihood, my fitness, my community, and above all else my identity…. The brutality in the performing arts is that if one is injured and cannot continue, someone else immediately takes your place. Whilst still on my crutches, I recall a young man flinging a glass door closed in my face. That signalled to me just how much I had been stripped of what was, for so long, a 'specialness' that I lived as a dancer. I had to build a new me not knowing what to do, where to go, starting from scratch.

Aged 27, I found myself in a position where I had little experience of the world of work outside of ballet and was going nowhere. However, I was keen to learn and would be happy to start from the bottom. Ballet-instilled resilience, disposition, steep but structured learning curves, and a couple of breakthroughs at very large, demanding, multinational, hierarchical organisations eventually made me feel that the large company setting, similar to that of a ballet company, suited me quite well. I was noticed by my bosses as someone who no matter how many hours I had to work, I got the work done. I settled in within a divisional Human Resources team role, with opportunities to learn and develop, at a very large investment banking institution in the City of London where I spent the next 17 years.

As time went by, the fact that I was working in an environment where newer recruits were all educated to degree-level, I reasoned that I needed to do something about that. In my 40s then, I undertook a business undergraduate degree. Not all of my friends, family, and colleagues were fans of the idea and some thought that, *at that age*, that was a waste of time. However, I benefitted from it immensely, enjoyed it, and that encouraged me to continue to pursue a master's degree. After graduating with first class honours, I went on to complete a master's degree achieving a distinction and simultaneously acquiring a professional HR qualification which I then upgraded through experience assessment. Again, I was advised by well-intentioned friends that I was *too old* for this. A similar scenario arose when I chose to pursue doctoral studies. I debated my rationale with friends, and also work colleagues, for wanting to make a contribution and a difference to embodied identity and age in Organisational Studies (OS). Their perception of what I should be doing or not, at *my age*, made me even more determined to want to make a difference.

Having the experience I had in ballet made me the person I am today. I learned that, despite the [sometimes unbearable] physical, financial, and personal struggles through the early years, where I thought I may not survive outside of the ballet world, there was a *little voice inside of me* saying that I could, and would, be able to do so. I did.

An overlapping feature between the daily experiences of being a ballet dancer and an HR professional is that, to a large extent, both occupations have little or no agency nor voice. Ballet dancers are required to meticulously follow the demands of the choreographer unquestioningly (Aalten, 2005). Human resources have to respond to line manager demands and, at all times, protect the organisation's interests irrespective of the moral and personal implications for the people involved. In addition, HR is the one profession that is generally not represented on the board of directors and therefore has no voting voice (Cummings, 2020). I had gone from one occupation that has no agency to another that had to similarly follow management requirements unquestioningly. From a very physically active daily work schedule and, importantly to me, feeling that I was doing something 'special' for audiences, to a rather sedentary role with long, demanding, working hours and cognitively challenging and stressful days that few appeared to really value. Now the only thing 'special' about my role was keeping my mouth shut about my knowledge of everybody's remuneration packages, promotions, grievances, and disciplinary issues. A saving grace, if any, was that the pay was eventually better. I could afford to live not too far away from where I worked. Out of the ashes of the lost dancer [me] rose a more determined and inspired [I] that saw me transform and grow post-traumatically (Maitlis, 2009). My lived experiences of having to transform and rebuild myself in less than ideal circumstances positioned me with empathy and understanding for others and I set about to make a difference in others' working lives. Along the way, I improved my education standing and rose to a senior rank within human resources.

Part of my motivation to study the influences of the body and age in the workplace was ignited by observing that a large number of colleagues at the bank would turn up at the in-house gym at 05:30am (myself included) and carry out workout sessions prior to settling in at their desks by 07:30am. My purpose for going to the gym was to get regular daily exercise that I was used to as a ballet dancer. With regards to some others though, I observed that their effort went beyond physical fitness and appeared to be focused upon their physical appearance instead. I questioned in my own mind why there was so much emphasis on their aesthetics. After all, their task was sedentary and cognitive in nature and did not require to conform to a particular aesthetic. I eventually fathomed out, from the recruiting and retention patterns, that a youthful-looking fit body was an essential ingredient that people needed to exhibit in order to gain and retain their jobs.

The competition in the banking environment is very high, and the opportunities are available to only those that can get through and maintain the interest of the line managers.

Investment bankers and ballet dancers have been likened to each other in respect of the preparation, resilience, and discipline that are required to get one's foot in the door (Crowe, 2015). Investment banking and ballet companies have some overlapping similarities too. They are youthful venerating industries; have a multinational workforce; notoriously hierarchical; very demanding organisations (Alvesson and Robertson, 2016). Visible signs of ageing must be dealt with by the individual to fit in and survive (Riach and Cutcher, 2014) so as to feed the organisation's need for immortality (Riach and Kelly, 2013).

Whilst the management narrative to staff was the championing and retention their most valuable assets – their people, the brief for the HR department and line managers alike was to right-size the organisation in line with tighter budgets. Older people, generally more experienced and who commanded larger compensation levels, regardless of their ability to do their jobs, had to go. Management's actions did not match their words. Even in the presence of the 2010 Equality Act and its nine protected characteristics, employees were being subjectively discriminated against by managers and HR on age-related grounds.

I developed a keen interest in this topic and its implications for individuals that had the knowledge, experience, and still had years, if not decades, to carry on working but were regularly assumed, on the basis of their chronological age rather than capability and interest, by their line managers and HR to be 'wanting to take it easier, or even retire'. Chronological age was, and is, a constant factor on the corporate table. Anecdotal observation though showed me that those that make it through to senior management level, and have a book full of contacts, become exempt and 'ageless'. The remainder of the workforce are constantly having to maintain their youthful appearance regardless of how well they perform their daily task. It was the behaviour of the managers that always insisted on hiring younger team members each year regardless of how well older candidates could perform the task that informed my interest in understanding the role of age at work.

Many years have gone by, and I managed to survive outside of the ballet world. As a young dancer I had ballet role models and, like them, I aspired to make a difference in the ballet world as I developed as an artist. I had to learn that life, whether I was in the ballet world or not, carries on. Everything for me had changed, but nothing had changed for the organisation that I had left behind. This was a very painful lesson both physically and emotionally. Pain is, however, the price one pays in life for having loved, in this case,

‘something’ very much. During my physical rehabilitation sessions that spanned months, I went through phases of confusion, incredulity (did this *really* happened to me?), heartfelt pain, fear about the present and the future. Returning to the ballet world as a researcher left me concerned as to how I would cope and, more importantly, give credence and voice to my participants. I embraced the challenge with renewed determination to make a difference in their world.

4.4 Little Red Riding Hood – The Epiphany

I did not initially set out to study professional ballet dancers for this PhD. Turning to ballet dancers came about fortuitously. The initial plan for my PhD was to extend what I had done in my MSc in Human Resource Development and Consultancy (HRD&C) dissertation. I was aware that there was a dearth of organisational studies in relation to people ageing whilst remaining in employment, as opposed to the gerontological study of retirees (Thomas, et al., 2014; Ainsworth, 2020). I was also concerned with how ageing, as an embodied identity, was experienced by individuals in a high-performance work environment (e.g.: financial traders, portfolio managers, medical doctors, lawyers).

This all changed when I read Christine Coupland’s (2015) study of professional rugby players followed by Loïc Wacquant’s (1995) boxers’ ethnography with a particular interest in embodied identity. These articles powerfully resonated with my own embodied memories of ballet, like ghosts from the past, that came tiptoeing back into my life (Goldspink and Engward, 2019). The parallel that Wacquant (1995) drew between boxers and ballet dancers’ embodied experiences, and Coupland’s (2015) reference to Wainwright and Turner (2006) study on ageing professional ballet dancers was the epiphany that gave me the impetus to follow the embodied occupational identity theme through the medium of ballet.

Little is known about professional ballet dancers as workers within OS, particularly taking an individual approach, and so this presented an opportunity for me (Kelman, 2000). I felt a strong sense that ballet dancers needed to be given voice, and that my study could make a contribution to filling that gap in the literature (Johnson, 2009). By embarking on this endeavour, the big bad wolf [ballet] was back in my life through the back door. At that point, I was not entirely sure whether I should embrace the challenge or run a mile! I took the plunge.

4.5 From the Stage to the Stalls – Positioning me as the Researcher

Researchers come with their own biographies and past experiences, and I am no exception. For decades now, I had a career in human resource management which was preceded by my first career in professional ballet. An important consideration for me was that I had not experienced being a ballet dancer beyond my mid-20s. Therefore, while I can relate to the youthful early stage of the professional career and all of its prior training, I have a natural blind spot to the experiential side of ageing within the occupation.

I, therefore, reflected on a number of self-imposed questions: Does this matter? Could I carry out the research with the competence and confidence required? How do I feel about not having had the opportunity of a ballet career beyond my mid-twenties? Do I feel that my injured body let me down? Was it my fault? Am I feeling frustrated? How do I feel about dancers that had, or are having, a full career? How am I *really* feeling? Does the dancer [me] feel that I was short-changed? Of course I do! Could I have prevented or recovered from my injury under today's healthcare regime? I simply don't know. Joint and surrounding soft tissue trauma requiring surgery is unpredictable in terms of making a full recovery to dance, particularly on pointe. Whilst I had seen others similarly injured retrained in other dance genres at the time, I did not feel that would be me.

Nonetheless, I recognised that ballet is a closed world where every effort is made to resist and guard against anything that may threaten its culture. Consequently, it needed someone with insider knowledge to prize open the issues (Wulff, 2001). An overarching challenge for me, therefore, was to treat the familiar as unfamiliar as far as possible. This required of me, inter alia, to ask my participants questions that an insider may consider obvious and so I warned them at the commencement of the interview that I would be doing this with the purpose of ensuring that I captured *their* experience and meaning rather to make an assumption that may not faithfully reflect their position.

My initial challenge with the research based upon ballet dancers was that having been outside of the ballet occupation for many years, I felt like an outsider with a lot of insider knowledge, someone constantly straddling these two spaces (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). I was unsure how I would connect with my participants and how they would connect with me. Whilst all my participants had been informed through my introduction that I had been a former dancer, none of them had ever met me before. As such, they did not know me (Hellawell, 2006). I considered it necessary not to interview dancers that I knew personally to prevent group think (Breen, 2007), as far as possible. There was, at least, a cohort gap between those that I interviewed, and me.

My own post-dancing career bodily changes compounded matters in that this now masks the former dancer within me. This was an aspect that, when considering facing other dancers, made me feel open to critique and vulnerable. Fortunately, throughout all of my interviews, no tensions materialised. In fact, when we got into the interview itself, I felt that my participants and I relaxed, and we were able to connect. This acceptance facilitated trust and allowed the conversation to flow. On reflection, it was more me than anything else thinking – still with my pointe shoes on – and not giving credit to the fact that my participants would recognise that I had long since departed the occupation. I recognised that I had gone from the stage to the stalls and was now an onlooker.

Embarking on the research journey, and studying ballet dancers, meant stepping back for the first time after many years into the very same studios where I did classes, had rehearsed before, and performed. Visiting some of the venues, or even their vicinity in some cases, looking into probably the very same mirrors but seeing quite a different image of myself, I was left with the weirdest of sensations. The 'biographical disruption' that occurred saw me having to reconcile the contradictions between my inner self and the image I observed reflected in the mirror (Cutcher, 2020). The image of myself in those mirrors, whilst familiar, looked nothing like what I was used to when [me] the dancer inhabited those spaces. So much had changed but yet nothing had changed. There I was, amongst 'strangers' that felt like colleagues to me, but they were doing *my* old job. Now, whilst I *felt* part of that world, the image I saw in the mirror was *no longer* part of it. In that setting, I [the researcher] was the outsider coming in and yet to me it felt as if I walked back into my old home (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). I would be lying if I were to say that this does not remain difficult for me to process to this day. At times you are in, others out. The reality is that I was somewhere in-between most of the time with some salient moments where I felt more an insider and at other times an outsider.

My participants and I share many similarities besides our ballet training and career experiences. For all of us, the process of moving to London and away from family at a young age, adapting to a completely unfamiliar environment (whether that meant moving from Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, Sydney, or Buenos Aires to London), learning a new language in some cases, adapting to a new culture, and the shared occupational identity were all overlapping experiences we had. This had the dual effect of enhancing and easing rapport, facilitating communication given our shared knowledge of ballet language and shared experience of the context and culture. It also potentially hindered me to observe nuances that may have been clearer if I had not had this shared background and characteristics with my participants. Another aspect that I share with my participants is that the ballet training that I received was premised upon the mantra:

'*blood, sweat, and tears will make you a ballet dancer*'. Pushing through natural body boundaries, and experiencing pain in the process, was something that I, and others, accepted as part and parcel of being a ballet dancer.

I became aware that my feelings of being either an insider or an outsider could have a bearing, not only on my interpretation of my participants' accounts, but could also possibly impact on my own mental wellbeing (Johnson, 2009). I went through a process of holding up a metaphoric mirror to myself and recognising my own feelings and interpretations. Only then, could I accept that there was a reality out there and that everyone of us experiences it differently (Taylor, 2018). While everyone's perception differed, they all had validity. I therefore had to actively recognise what was *me*, and what was *them*, and open myself up to my participants' interpretations of their experiences.

The dreaded recollection of my injury reared its head in not only one, but a number of my participants' accounts. Some overlapped with my own experience of having a show-stopping injury. *Clara's*, and *John's* accounts were the two that spoke more deeply about their fears of the consequences of the injuries for their careers and identities. Both *Clara* and *John* had surgery followed by a year-long rehabilitation process. There were other accounts too, but it was *Clara's* account of her fear of uncertainty regarding her future dancing career, and *John's* painful rehabilitation process that resonated with me as an insider having encountered similar embodied experiences. Not just the emotional experiences but the actual impact on one's physical being was at the heart of these exchanges. They touched me deeply, and I found myself having to deal with my emotions beyond cursory considerations. This raises the spectre of potential bias of the insider versus the lack of empathy and understanding of the deeper nuances enshrined in being an outsider. I deployed the reflexive mechanisms enshrined in the IPA process to address these biases as far as possible.

For those who are fortunate to survive a full career, the inevitable career transitioning day arrives. Dancers are said to die twice. This day, to many, represents their first death. My departure felt very much the same. My experience, thereafter, endeavouring to start a new life was a factor that the career transitioning and transitioned dancers shared with me.

4.6 Can I Do My Participants Justice?

In the preparation process prior to embarking on the interview process, I had a debate with myself relating to the merits and de-merits of disclosing to the prospective participants that I had a background in professional ballet. On the one hand, for

impartiality purposes, I thought it may have been better that my participants were not made aware that I was at least partially an insider. Meeting with a neutral researcher may have left them feeling that the research was likely to be more impartial. However, on the other hand, with my knowledge of the occupation it would soon become apparent to them that I had insider knowledge and, if that was undisclosed, my participants may feel that they had not been fully appraised of the true situation. I concluded, therefore, that disclosing upfront that I had a ballet background was the appropriate and ethical way forward.

Making contact with my would-be participants and eventually meeting with them was an exhilarating and, at times, emotive process for me. The active dancers, in particular, had very busy schedules with unpredictable last-minute changes being dictated by their ballet companies. This required scheduling and re-scheduling a number of times but fortunately, the vast majority of participants eventually met with me, and I was able to conduct the interviews.

Having disclosed to my participants upfront that I had been a professional ballet dancer facilitated the dialogue. Along the way, at times, this was evidenced by them saying "…*well, you know what is like…"* inevitably followed by a smile and my polite request to expand on what that experience was like *for them.* With the exception of the topic of age and ageing that was the 'elephant in the room', I felt that – overall - my participants were open, forthcoming, very detailed (particularly with regard to training and injury), and at ease. My flexibility with their choice of environment created the atmosphere in which my participants were willing to share deeper feelings about sensitive situations. At times, I was divided across the dual roles of the researcher ['I'] and the former dancer ['me']. Some aspects of my participants' accounts resonated with me in as much as I had emotive feelings to some of their experiences.

When I first started to interview my participants, and then transcribe and analyse the interviews, I wrestled with acknowledging a number of aspects that I encountered during the process. Data interpretation is not free of the researcher's values and preconceived assumptions brought to the research (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). I had to, however, ensure that I did not unintentionally replace my participants experience with my own as the object of inquiry (Weick, 2002).

When I undertook the analysis, I had to address and delineate my participants' encounters as distinct from my own responses to similar situations. Accordingly, self-awareness, engagement with the formulation and data collection, and subsequent analysis required careful reflection and attention (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). During the process of analysis, the difficulties that I encountered having had to leave behind the occupation, re-surfaced. Initially, I attempted to bracket out those feelings that were

overwhelming me. In particular, I endeavoured to suppress my sense of longing for my past life but felt that I had to face up to it and address it so that I could progress in a professional manner giving my participants' accounts credence. This process endured for a number of weeks, and it was finally resolved after I consulted with a professional who helped me to, finally, come to terms with the loss. I was able then to proceed with more confidence that I could identify my own personal feelings and endeavoured to limit their influence on my interpretation of my participants interpretation of their experiences.

A learning from this experience is that greater attention needs to be paid by doctoral researchers and their supervisors at the commencement of the research process to the potential risks and impact that the individual may encounter during their doctoral research journey. I took good care to consider my physical safety and wellbeing but underestimated the potential for re-opening a past life and its possible impact upon my mental wellbeing.

It is a given that the same interview transcript would elicit two different interpretations when analysed by two different researchers. This occurred with a number of passages in the analysis section which elicited debate with my supervisor and, at times, resulted in reconsideration. Changes to my supervision arrangements towards the latter part of my doctoral journey brought a new perspective to my study and enabled me to better express my own feelings and understanding of the issues at hand. My new principal supervisor had a background in dance and a keen interest in ballet in particular. This change, and the fresh exchanges and discussions that ensued with someone that could empathise with the context under study felt liberating to me. I was able to better express wider dimensions and bring to the fore those ballet specific nuances that coloured the way in which aspects could be interpreted.

Hindsight has informed me that greater depth of understanding of the value and process of reflexivity at the beginning of my PhD journey would have informed a number of processes somewhat differently. The type of self-observation and reflexions in my journal entries may have covered more than just my own experiences and feelings but also to reflect on the actual process that I was going through together with a more fine-tuned approach to my participants' responses, certainly in the early stages of the data collection process. For example, while my pilot interview worked out well in terms of the data I received, I was not fully prepared for some of the inner tensions I experienced when receiving participants responses that differed quite substantially with my own preconceptions. For example: getting into vocational ballet school, for me, was a pro-active big deal with high stakes even at the age of 11. I was taken aback when one of my participants, *Audrey*, told me nonchalantly (in the transcript table below), that she "tagged along" with a friend. I noted my feelings and reaction:

Table 8 – Audrey's Transcript Extract - Personal Reflections

Interview Extract	**Initial Thoughts**	**Personal reflections**
"…and then, I guess, when I was 10 a friend of mine wanted to go to the audition for [vocational ballet school] and so I tagged along with her, as you do. And, of course, they asked me to …they sort of shortlisted me, you know…. whatever the process is…" Audrey (L. 34-36)	She 'tagged along' with her friend…feels as if she didn't want to necessarily join the ballet school. Someone else '*they asked me…*' recognised her potential talent. Sounds as if she was not interested in ballet at the time…'*whatever is the process*'. Early in the interview. Did she develop an interest later? [No, see L. 295-305].	W H O!......*just* tags along to an audition aged 10…? Shockwave down my spine. Jaw dropped. CAREFUL…she is letting me into her experience, how it was **for her**. What I experienced was quite different.

Another researcher with a different experience to mine, analysing the same passage may not have batted an eyelid. However, my background and experiences signalled that, at that young age, one simply could not have just "*tagged along*" with a friend to audition at any school. At the very least, a parent would have had to submit a written application process on behalf of the auditioning child. Having said that it could be that, to *Audrey*, she was so disengaged and uninterested that, as far as she was concerned, she was indeed tagging along. That was *her* experience, and I had to accept it at face value. Aware of my conflictive emotions, I controlled my response and focused on listening to her account and on remaining interested. The inner shock for me left me a little stunned and so I did not probe this issue further which, with hindsight I should have done. I eventually appreciated that this was an unknown unknown for me given my experiences which I ultimately came to terms with.

An entry in my journal depicts my reaction during another interview with a different participant. *Nelly* was articulating to me how, in her opinion, transitioning as a principal dancer was much harder to do ("the higher you've gone in your career…") and to reinvent yourself in another field at the end of the ballet career. Her account and my reflections are depicted in the transcript table below:

Table 9 – Nelly's Transcript Extract - Personal Reflections

Interview Extract	**Initial Thoughts**	**Personal reflections**
"…I think you will find this interesting…I think that the higher you've gone in your career, the harder it is to transfer unless you go onto dance. When you have reached that point of excellence, I think it is harder to move on to something else. I really do. […] It is harder because you had that degree of excellence and, I think, it is like… trying teach someone a new skill". Nelly (L. 585-589 and 601-602)	She is finding transitioning very hard and attributes that to her high achievements and wealth of experience given the length of her career. Draws a comparison between those getting far (principals) in their career (L. 590-596). Those in lower ranks do not exist? She was an excellent dancer but now feels limited (may be uncomfortable as well – explore?) learning new skills in a different field a challenge for her.	Why did she think I will find this interesting? …..It is H A R D for EVERYBODY who had pursued their dream, joined a company…but for a variety of different reasons are now doing something else. NOT just those that achieved principal status!!!! 'Excellence'…Is she saying that unless you are a principal, you have not achieved 'excellence'? How can she be SO selfish?! Makes me angry. WAIT! I must not let these emotions cloud my thinking. Breathe in, breathe out. Think about this, do not stand in your shoes, stand in hers. Perhaps she is experiencing so much pain herself that she can't see anyone else's pain….?

These entries, amongst others, helped me to see and understand, how my participants' narratives triggered these intruding emotions and influenced my thinking. Seeing them so clearly, and processing them, helped me to understand that my emotions prevented me from standing side-by-side with my participants as much as I needed to. I was so near, yet so far away. I needed to be closer.

4.7 My Learning Journey – Just like stitches pulling in a wound

As a doctoral researcher, I am a novice to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, undertaking my maiden voyage (Smith, Larkin and Flowers, 2009). My prior research experience was limited to using template analysis (King and Horrocks, 2011) for my MSc dissertation, and a combination of questionnaire and thematic analysis for my undergraduate dissertation.

Having considered other methodologies and deciding that an experiential methodology was best suited to answer my research questions came with some challenges. Researchers in the department, and fellow PhD students, pursued varied methodologies. However, IPA was not one of them. This made me feel somewhat isolated and so I set about finding fora where I could gain insights and experience from others. I joined the London IPA discussion group that met every two months, and also the IPA online forum where lively methodological debates take place. I also invested in,

and attended, various external workshops delivered by IPA academics and took every opportunity to deliver presentations at the annual internal PhD Conferences and Qualitative Methods in Action Days to gain experience and get feedback. The coming to fruition following the upgrade of my research project unfortunately coincided with the Covid-19 outbreak and the ensuing lockdowns preventing participation at academic conferences. In the Summer of 2022, I was given the opportunity to present an extract of my work at Birkbeck's Organizational Psychology Departmental Summer Seminar. This was followed by my contribution to 'Performing Arts as Work Symposium' at the European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology Conference in Bordeaux, France.

Through these processes I was able to gain some insights into the practice experiences of more seasoned researchers, as well as exchanging peer experiences with other novice researchers. However, IPA cannot be learned by reading a recipe. It is a layered process that requires action learning (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Through reading and re-reading several times, and bouts of simmering and reflection, one eventually makes sense of the participants' sensemaking.

This reflexive process, that forms part of the IPA methodology, has similarly proven to be both challenging but extremely valuable to my learning. It is difficult for me to identity a specific point at which the reflexive process started to make a material difference to my study. However, I certainly experienced learning and growth during the transcription of the interviews and the analysis phases of my journey.

As a result of my own experience, having been injured at work, I felt a visceral reluctance but given the extent of the inclusion of pain and injury in my participants' accounts I felt compelled to address these issues and give my participants voice. At the beginning I 'normalised' my participants' experiences, and became 'numb'. Recalling that, experiencing sore muscles the morning after a performance or dancing through injuries, signalled that I was working hard, and this was a normal expectation. In fact, when I was still dancing, if I had not felt that way I would have done a quick check to ensure that I had done enough. When I later transcribed and listened to my participants accounts I did not see anything untoward with their experiences but there was something *niggling* [I] the researcher.

Later, reading through academic and healthcare materials, going over and over my participants' accounts, presenting to audiences comprised of outsiders to the occupation, and finally a lot of self-introspection, I became converted to the acceptance that the ballet culture and the dancers normalised the process of dancing with pain and injuries. I admit that the dancer [me] just accepted it as part of the occupation as well. It took time for this way of thinking to crystallise for me as being fundamentally wrong about

the tolerance of chronic pain and injury being normal in anybody's job. This became a revelation to me, the first of a number of revelations to follow.

The very strict training that we all endured was a prominent feature in all of my participants accounts. However, some participants, particularly those who attended full-time boarding vocational ballet school from a young age were amongst those that experienced draconian pedagogic and disciplinary methods that I had not experienced. At the time, the London-based ballet school I went to did not offer boarding facilities to their final year students so I was unaware of these early learning methods. My question was then: How can these extremes, and their side effects, be avoided or prevented? Can they be prevented given the nature of the task? Can an elite ballet dancer really be developed without resorting to such drastic measures? The many consequences of the normalisation of authoritarian training techniques, overwork, pain, and injury alerted me to the potential immediate, and also medium and long-term consequences for our whole body and for our careers as dancers. Injury certainly shortened my ballet career, and it came very close to curtailing some of my participants' careers too (e.g.: *Clara, David, Fiona, John, Tracy*). What would it take to change this enduring culture? A year into her first professional job, *Beatrice* recounted her experience of turning down a job with an elite ballet company because she did not want to dance on an injury, and they were unrelenting on their demands:

Table 10 – Beatrice's Transcript Extract - Personal Reflections

Interview Extract	**Initial Thoughts**	**Personal reflections**
"….it wasn't a stress fracture, it was just bone stress, but I think…yeah…it was causing me a few problems. So I had to turn down the opportunity to dance with [elite ballet company]. Which they weren't too happy about as in the school and the company. They are not used to being turned down, because no-one else would, no-one else in my year would do it. There are so many people dancing with injuries like that, and some of them were going on now…" (L. 847-857) Beatrice (18 F)	It takes a really brave final year ballet student to stand up to the elite ballet company and refuse to dance on an injury. Note: *Beatrice* had an alternative offer from another elite ballet company (L. 843) and her career, therefore, was not entirely at risk except that she had to come to terms with the fact that she would not be working for her preferred ballet company.	WOW! Nobody that I know would have dreamed of going against ballet management wishes. It is a very confident 18-year-old that would make this sort of decision and it is commendable that in her own account she makes mention of her body being central to her entire future. She did not want to jeopardise her health.

Would *Beatrice* have acted in a similar way if she had not had the alternative job to go to is a question the answer to which I will never know. She was adamant in her account though that she was determined not to damage herself further. Nevertheless, more assertiveness is required of ballet dancers to resist pressure to dance injured.

Going through my participants accounts, in particular those that explored their experiences of the final phase, or the end of their careers, inevitably brought back struggles, and memories of my own lack of preparation to survive outside of the ballet bubble. Looking back, I feel now wholeheartedly relieved that me [the dancer] that underwent career transition 'hopping' (literally) on bright yellow crutches through the tempest and turmoil of coming to terms with my changed life is behind me. After rehabilitation, I navigated a variety of possible occupations, roles, most leading to cul-de-sacs, others with differing success.

Ballet went from being my whole life, to being but a part of who I am today. Although the physical scars have largely healed, at that point during data analysis I could feel that psychological scars remained raw just like stitches pulling in a wound. However, owing to the analysis process and my reflexive engagement, I felt that for the first time in decades I could look at this issue more objectively. All of this meant that I had to constructively address my own emotional situation before I could carry on with the analysis, feeling confident that I would be doing my participants' accounts justice. I learned from this process to listen more carefully to my participants' accounts, and also to try to understand their individual plights rather than its interpretation couched in balletic culture. Acknowledging the potential for my emotions to intrude into my analysis was the first step, followed by recording my feelings alongside the transcript and then drawing a distinction between my account and my participants' sensemaking of their accounts.

I had this constant soliloquy whereby I questioned *who* was analysing the work: me [the dancer] or I [the researcher] (Johnson, 2009). For example, in the table below I reflect an excerpt from *Audrey's* interview where I was evaluating whether or not it was my sentiment towards a ballet career that I was evaluating or *Audrey's* and was I interpreting her account seen through my own lens or hers.

Table 11 – Audrey's Interview Extract - Personal Reflections

Interview Extract	Initial Thoughts	Personal reflections
"…I ***never*** *really enjoyed dancing the big classics very much, but I was a dancer who physically was* ***very*** *suited to the classics, but I much more enjoyed the neo-classic stuff, the new works, all that kind of thing. I think I was secretly a bit of a contemporary dancer but locked in a classical ballet dancer's body. Yes." (L. 415-418) Audrey (39 F)*	'Never' and 'very' – quite extreme adverbs. The emphasis was strong on the tape. Her classical ballet body locked her in to the classical repertoire but perhaps also locked her out from contemporary dance companies? Is it only her body that locks her in or out? Seeking agency more readily available in the contemporary realm? This is something that classical ballet does not offer.	In my mind, there I am sitting opposite someone that had achieved everything that every (every…?) classical ballet dancer would have wanted to achieve and, by her own account has the quintessential ballet body, and was being cast in leading roles and yet she wants to do contemporary dance! At this point, the dancer in me, is puzzled, angry, confused, jealous, and above all else sad. *Audrey* has everything that a ballet dancer would wish for, she also became a principal… and yet, no, that's not for her. Aaaaggghh! How can this be? Why did she pursue a classical ballet career if her heart wasn't in it? She left the ballet company not to move to another company but to move industries. OK, ….emotions are getting the better of me…I have to be careful here NOT to take the view of the dancer [me] to this passage.

By this point in the analysis, even though I had previously heard *Audrey* say that she was ambivalent to ballet (e.g.: L. 39, 296, 300), my own feelings on the topic prevented me from fully appreciating the extent to which, despite her perseverance and success as a classical ballet dancer, that she would rather do something else. I had bought the 'tutu and tiara fairy tale' completely, and enjoyed most of it, so it was hard for me to envisage that others may not feel that way.

What singled her case out for me, and evoked this emotional response was her ambivalence to the artform that clashed with my view. In her own words, she had been given opportunities that other contemporaries did not have, and yet this was not of interest to her. I could just not get my head around her rationale for having everything open to her and that was not what she wanted to do. The contrast with other participants, at times battling to open doors and gain access to opportunities, compared to her nonchalant dismissal of the great openings that she turned down, left me dumbfounded and emotional. I had to distance my own sentiments from her account and take it at face

value rather than relate it to my feelings, and those of others, that I have witnessed during my time as a dancer. I needed to re-read her account from the beginning a number of times, setting aside my own views and feelings, and listening carefully to *Audrey's* experiences to do it justice.

Whilst *Audrey's* account contrasted with how [me] the dancer felt about ballet, *Maria's* account, on the other hand, touched a nerve of similarity. *Maria* was in the closing phases of her career and was expressing serious reservations about her future, particularly in relation to her post-dancing career prospects. This resonated with my own experience but was complicated for me by injury, rather than functional age that was afflicting *Maria*. The following passage reflects my dilemma with my interpretation of her account:

Table 12 - Maria's Interview Extract - Personal Reflections

Interview Extract	**Initial Thoughts**	**Personal reflections**
"It's funny because now I am thinking…. I mean, ***apart*** *from waving my arms and doing the splits, what other skills …. you know….. you know the thing was 'what skills that I've got that* ***I*** *feel* ***comfortable*** *exploring'* ***that's*** *the thing. …[…]….but then, of course, now I am shadowing, I am like '****aaaaaaagh….shit!!!!!!*** *this is serious" (L. 1348-1354) Maria (42 F).*	Exiting the ballet performing career…vulnerability. Shadowing here meant being exposed to activities and skills that she is not familiar with. Her lack of exposure outside of ballet makes her feel very vulnerable. Final lap of her performing career, not something distant in the future. Painful and scary for her to digest and accept. Feels unprepared for a life outside ballet.	Oh, my goodness…Does *Maria* feel vulnerable or am I re-living my own fears? This is where I was in my mid-20s! Felt very unprepared for life outside of ballet. What a nightmare! Not something I would wish on anyone. I must confirm whether *Maria* is indeed feeling vulnerable and that is not me projecting my past experiences and fears onto her account. Reading further *Maria* seems to be existentially vulnerable (L. 1427-1428). The main issues with her are ballet career end, alternative identities, lack of confidence (L. 1607).

I was satisfied that I was able to distinguish between *Maria's* lack of confidence and vulnerability relating to the prospect of a new role outside of ballet and my own existential vulnerability as a result of a medium-term rehabilitation process that prevented me from working at all for a number of months after exiting ballet. I was therefore able to analyse the passage, in line with her wider account with a focus on *her* experiences and ensuring that I wasn't projecting my own situation onto hers.

4.8 Conclusion

I fully appreciated and embraced the notion of, and need for, researcher's reflexive practice in order to endeavour to enhance the quality and rigor of the qualitative research process. Having decided to deploy IPA, I gained an appreciation of the process of reflexive practice enshrined in the method. I initially underestimated the layered depth of interpretation of IPA and how researcher's reflexivity is enmeshed with that process.

As I got into the process of analysis, and I delved deeper and deeper into my own reflexive experiences and thoughts it felt as though I was becoming more and more exposed, leaving me feeling very vulnerable. The depth of reflexion took place at three levels for me: ballet itself, my research project, and me as the researcher. This reflexive process unexpectedly brought about a deeply emotive reaction surfacing profound and deeply suppressed feelings of loss and pain resulting from my unexpected and sudden departure from the ballet world. I struggled to deal with what I thought I had buried a long time ago. Professional support and greater engagement with the reflexive process enabled me to better manage those past ghosts. Ultimately, reflexivity did assist with rigor in the analysis process which was both very challenging but also liberating, in the end. From a positive perspective, the reflexive process enabled me to identify and address occupational blind spots and, taking inspiration from the work of Coupland (2015) and Wacquant (1995) that resonated deeply, beyond the cursory, bringing my embodied experiences of ballet back to life.

Reflecting on my work experiences in ballet and also in HR/banking in the City, I drew a broad parallel between some aspects of the two occupations. Whilst on the surface, they are both quite different and ballet is often seen as a curious world, through the process of reflection, I observed that some of their inner workings mirror each other. Not that I would make any claims that IPA or qualitative research is generalisable, the observations from my study have potentially wider resonance with other occupations.

During the research process, robust measures are put in place to ensure that the participants' interests, wellbeing and safety are assured. A primary learning from the reflexive process that I undertook is that it is equally important for greater care to be taken of the researcher, commencing at the early stages of the research process, to ensure both their physical and mental wellbeing.

My overall analysis of the reflexive journey is that it is very challenging emotionally and difficult to engage with particularly at the early stages. I was able to maintain my focus on doing my participants justice throughout by ensuring that whatever I was doing I took into account how my work would impact their interests and to maintain participant's voice.

5 Chapter 5: Research Methodology

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 3, I carried out a critical integrative literature review of works relating to the study of identity within the realm of Organisational Studies (OS) with particular focus on the embodied aspects thereof. I addressed pertinent empirical studies that have been conducted in that realm to date and concluded that neither the constructionist nor the constructivist approaches, that predominate in the field, fulfilled my interest to study the lived body as it relates to occupational identity. I established that there is need for occupational identity to be addressed from the viewpoint of the individual rather than as seen from the organisational perspective as tends to be the norm in OS (Atewologun, et al., 2017). More specifically, I addressed an occupation where the body is at the centre of the task and crafted for purpose. This occupation fuelled the motivation for my study to be predicated upon the deployment of phenomenology in pursuit of the individual lived experience of professional ballet dancers.

I discussed, in some detail, the contributions that prior research in the realm of OS has made towards the understanding of occupational identity, and the contribution that the body makes in this process. In particular, I addressed the contributions made by Michel Foucault in relation to the notion of organisational management and control of the individual worker, and the influence that the organisation has over the body. Studies deploying Foucauldian power, discipline, and surveillance aspects of organisational discourse contributed to the understanding of the interrelationship of the organisation (society) as the protagonist, and the individual as the recipient of influence (Foucault, 1977). In social constructionism, the body is considered to be constructed by society through the medium of discourse and, as such, perceived to be inferior to the mind. In Foucauldian thinking, the body was rendered docile and an "absent presence" (Shilling, 2012, p. 12). In effect, it is said that the body's materiality dissipates in discourse (Shilling, 1991). Embodiment cannot be fully apprehended as a lived experience through constructionism where, epistemologically, discourse is the predominant source of knowledge and where the phenomenological body is denied (Turner, 2008). The study of the body, therefore, taking a constructionist approach, would not contribute to my objective of understanding the subjective lived body's contribution to occupational identity construction.

This limitation is of particular importance to my study in relation to the notion of age and ageing where studies in OS, thus far, have mostly taken a discursive approach (e.g.: Trethewey, 2001; Ainsworth, 2002; Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004, 2007, 2009; Riach and Loretto, 2009; Riach and Kelly, 2015; Pritchard and Whiting, 2014; Thomas, et al., 2014; Manor, 2017; Krekula, Nikander and Wilinska, 2018; Arman, Kaderfords and

Wikstr, 2021). Whilst these studies have been helpful to understand how discourse shapes age and ageing at work, they do not address the individual lived experience of that ageing-at-work process. My study is specifically concerned with the lived experience of age and ageing as it relates to the working ballet dancer. Phenomenology presents an opportunity to address this notion of ageing in a much more embodied fashion bringing into focus the lived experience of youthful ageing occurring within the working environment. The body makes a re-appearance in phenomenological terms (Leder, 1990) where it is both "a generator as well as receptor of meanings" providing for an environment to study the body's active engagement in identity construction (Twigg, 2007, p. 290). Before turning my attention to phenomenology, I briefly address the role of constructivist thinking in OS. I address, in particular, the role of Pierre Bourdieu and his Theory of Practice (1972/1977).

In an effort to address the mind-body divide, Bourdieu explored methodology that could address the gap between the constructionist paradigm of decoding the meaning of the body in the cultural realm and sought to incorporate the materiality of the phenomenal body. While Bourdieu's earlier thinking was inspired by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (Crossley, 2001; Marcoulatos, 2001), his notion of the habitus continued to be influenced by the idea that society constructs the body (McNay, 1999). He differed though from constructionist thinking in that he postulated that the individual is not merely the recipient of discipline and control over their bodies from society. He argued that the body remains an unfinished project as it responds to the influences of society imprinted upon it (Shilling, 2012). Accordingly, Bourdieu brings the notion of the material body (physical capital) to bear in the socio-political discourse and concludes that "the body is in the social world but the social world is also in the body", a symbiotic relationship (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 190).

Proponents of his Theory of Practice (1972/1977) deploy the framework which they found useful for positioning the body at the nexus between the individual and society (Shilling, 2012). The Bourdieusian concept has been instrumental in empirical studies to address, inter alia, the interrelationship between the notions of the objective and aspirational bodies (Wacquant, 1995; McGillivray, Fern and McIntosh, 2005; Thornborrow and Brown, 2009; Alexias and Dimitropoulou, 2011; Coupland, 2015; Rodrigues et al., 2020).

The principal limitation of Bourdieu's framework for my study is that it remains centred in the socio-political conception of the construction of the body and where the individual responds in a circular manner to the influences of society. Individuals respond to organisation/society and, through the habitus, sediment knowledge, skills and dispositions (physical capital) into the body. This physical capital is then transformed by

the individual into an exchange with the organisation/society for other forms of capital (Crossley, 2001). The locus of control thus remains vested in society and the individual has limited responsive agency (Wolkowitz, 2006; Evans, Whiting and Mackenzie Davey, 2020).

As established in the previous chapter, my principal focus is to study the individual and their lived experience in relation to their occupational identities along with the implications for them in terms of youthful ageing in the workplace. Idiography, enshrined in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, provides a fitting mechanism through which I chose to study these lived experiences of my participants' occupational identities (Tomkins and Eatough, 2013).

5.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is a qualitative approach underpinned by phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). Drawing mostly on the work of Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Paul Ricoeur, it seeks to apprehend the contextualised experiences which distinguishes it from other phenomenological approaches that focus on the description of essences (Gill, 2020). Whilst its origin is in health psychology, its deployment in OS has seen a gradual uptake (e.g.: Millward, 2006; Fitzgerald and Howe-Walsh, 2009; Tomkins and Eatough, 2013, 2014; Tomkins, 2014; Gill 2014, 2015, 2020; de Miguel, et al., 2015; Bozga, McDowall and Brown, 2021).

Ontologically, IPA is concerned with the examination of detailed experience and less so with the abstract and political stances inherent in constructionist approaches (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008). It is more critical and perceives experience to be embedded in a complex layered context (Smith, 2004), and tends to concentrate on richer description and interpretation rather than explanations of the phenomenon. IPA subscribes to a critical realist ontology that recognises that there is an independent reality beyond human experience (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Epistemologically, this knowledge beyond discourse, is iteratively re-assessed to uncover deeper layers of meaning and new interpretations relating to each individual experience (Sims-Schouten, Riley and Willig, 2007). It is this deeper exploration with a more holistic scope for knowledge and interpretation that underpins the principles of IPA (Spiers, 2012).

I address the three philosophical pillars of IPA in order below:

5.2.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology, first and foremost a philosophical movement and also a methodology, seeks to understand *what it is like* to be human and is concerned with the way in which things (phenomena) appear to us (Tomkins and Eatough, 2013). Phenomenology is thus particularly concerned with the way humans experience phenomena and how those phenomena provide meaning for them (Küpers, 2015). It is experiential in nature and undergone increasing interest in recent times amongst OS scholars, albeit with cautious uptake (Tomkins and Eatough, 2013; Gill, 2020).

Phenomenology draws mainly on the work of German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), and his student Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). As with most disciplines, phenomenology is characterised by diverse, and at times contrasting, approaches (Willig, 2007; Tomkins and Eatough, 2013). However, the Husserlian descriptive and the Heideggerian interpretive approaches have become more prominent in contemporary research (Gill, 2020).

Husserl's descriptive phenomenology seeks to describe the essence of an experience, where the researcher seeks to address "the things themselves", bracketing out all preconceptions (Eatough and Smith, 2017, p. 195). The focus therefore is on an uncluttered view of the phenomenon, cleansed of researcher's biases, and described by Husserl as the "phenomenological attitude" (Finlay, 2009, p. 8). Husserl's descriptive phenomenology formed the foundation upon which further phenomenological thinking developed. Heidegger challenges this Husserlian presupposition of 'epoche' (bracketing) and argues that it is not possible for the researcher to factor out their own presuppositions (Gill, 2014). He argued that the individual exists in a world which is culturally informed, and where they are conditioned by their history and from which they are unable to escape (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Experience is always contextualised and, in this way, traditions and culture inform an individual's understanding of their experiences (Gill, 2014). The Husserlian phenomenological attitude states that the researcher needs to adopt a *presuppositionless* point of departure (Küpers, 2015).

Acknowledging the founding of his engagement with phenomenology in Husserl's teachings, Heidegger departed from Husserlian theoretical and abstract transcendental thinking towards a more existential positioning. The ontological departure for Heideggerian phenomenology, therefore, is enshrined in the concept of "Dasein" or 'being there' – the science of human existence (Heidegger, 1996, p. 33). A key Heideggerian principle is that there is an indissoluble unity between the person and the world – they are co-constituted (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Heidegger, therefore, shifts more robustly away from Cartesian thinking (mind/body divide) to a concept of a unified body that situates the process of cognition as a centrally embodied activity (Moran, 2000;

Anderson, 2003). Heideggerian phenomenology is hermeneutic or interpretive in nature (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). Heidegger's thinking formed the foundation for further development of hermeneutic phenomenology by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) and Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) who, in turn, informed further radical developments undertaken by existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) (Langdridge, 2007).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a French philosopher and psychologist, draws on both Husserlian and Heideggerian philosophical thinking, but it is the interpretive approach of Heidegger upon which Merleau-Ponty primarily bases his philosophical positioning (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). In particular, Merleau-Ponty concurs with Heidegger in that he places agency in the remit of the individual rather than society (Anderson, 2003). Merleau-Ponty then extends Heideggerian thinking in that he places the undivided body at the centre of human experience (Crossley, 2001). Merleau-Ponty situates the body at the nexus between the individual and society but with agency vested in the individual (Küpers, 2014).

Merleau-Ponty's philosophical thinking forms the foundation of mid-20th century phenomenological psychology and continues to have contemporary appeal particularly in the realm of embodied subjectivity (Langdridge, 2007; Purser, 2018). His perspectives provide an opportunity to develop a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of how meaning is established through the pre-reflective embodiment (i.e.: movement, gestures, images, drawings, photography, non-verbal communication) that illuminates the sensory experience of a phenomenon (Küpers, 2015). Merleau-Ponty perceives the body as the interface of perception and living in the process of meaning-making (Küpers, 2015). This thinking emphasises the individual's situated embodied nature of their relationship to the world rather than the broader worldliness existence that is the emphasis of Heideggerian thinking (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). Merleau-Ponty's aim was to reveal *that* knowledge that lies beneath the objective and detached (surface) knowledge of the body that the individual only knows by virtue of their body being an (inescapable) omnipresence in their lives (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962).

The lived body is in the world, but the world is also in the lived body (Leder, 1992). Practical activities and social relations, for Merleau-Ponty are more important than abstract or logical interpretations of the body (Anderson, 2003). Taking a phenomenological approach to examine extreme embodied occupations (e.g.: ballet) provides a mechanism to challenge stereotypes through the exploration of individual experience, mediated through cultural and other external factors (Tulle, 2015). The holistic body (the unified mind-body notion mentioned above) is, therefore, central in shaping our understanding and knowledge of the world and is the subject to be perceived

and understood albeit culturally mediated (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). It is through the individual's own body signalling (e.g.: perception, proprioception, and kinesthesis) that individuals derive meaning (Tomkins and Eatough, 2013). It is this integrated mind-body process that Merleau-Ponty refers to as the "body schema" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 239).

The body schema is an embodied mechanism that enables the individual to coordinate their physical, haptic, movement, visual, and auditory senses of a subject into a single space (Grosz, 1994). In other words, for the individual, engagement with the world is experienced through a homogenised body system. The body schema develops as a result of our sense of proprioception emanating from our physical interaction with others and objects in the environment (Purser, 2018). It evolves through social interaction and is partly derived from our perception of others' bodies and through their reaction to ours (Sergeeva, Faraj and Huysman, 2020). In amongst a wide array of definitions of embodiment, it is Merleau-Ponty's interpretation thereof that is at the essence of IPA (Langdridge, 2007; Barbour, 2016). In essence then, embodiment is the "phenomenological or psychological notion of the body that transcends (but is grounded in) the physicality of the body" (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 199).

Movement (as in sports or dance movement) brings about an immediacy of sensation and lived experience involving the whole body (Leder, 1990). It is the patterned and rhythmic coordination of the body parts (muscles, tendons, ligaments, limbs, etc.) that results in feelings of success, happiness, and even physical euphoria (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) that has a direct bearing on the individual's self-perception and identity (Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2007). It is through high levels of activity and concentration that awareness of the sensations is developed and become habituated into the body schema (Crossley, 2001). The nature of Merleau-Ponty's body schema/habitus is not a static, immovable, habit, but a "moving equilibrium" where the individual influences society and society influences the individual as in a two-way street (Crossley, 2001, p. 117). Actions result in the development of habits and mutating habits result in new actions which, in turn, sediment new skills and competencies within the individual's body (Crossley, 2001). The body is thus actively engaged during the process of decision making and informs the limits to which the individual is able to implement and sustain change. It is thus embedded habit or "lived equilibria", rather than rational reflection alone, that drives our patterns of behaviour (Marcoulatos, 2001, p. 11). Consequently, how the phenomenological body shapes our knowledge of the world is critical for studies of embodied identity (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009).

5.2.2 Hermeneutics

Returning to the hermeneutic concepts enshrined in Heideggerian theory, it is important to position it in relation to its role in phenomenology, and more specifically in IPA. Hermeneutics is a somewhat older philosophical movement than phenomenology that aims at interpreting understanding and has its origins in the interpretation of biblical text (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000). It developed out of the realm of theology and into a wider array of research fields finding its way into the realm of psychology (Smith, 2007). Among the many contributions to the hermeneutic turn, Friedrich Schleiermacher's (1768-1834) contribution at the beginning of the 19th century brought into focus a systematic approach involving both the analysis of the objective textual meaning, as well as a mechanism for gaining understanding of the individuality of the orator (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Schleiermacher reasoned that text is informed by the writer and how they deploy language, as well as the social context surrounding the writer (Eatough and Smith, 2017). In so doing Schleiermacher "bridges the essentialist and discursive divide" (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 22).

It is within this context of Schleiermacher's positioning of hermeneutic interpretation that Heidegger departs from Husserlian thinking, and makes the case for hermeneutic phenomenology (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Heidegger (1927/1962) in his work 'Being and Time' postulates that phenomenology is comprised of two distinct parts: *phenomenon* and *logos*. The Greek term *phenomenon,* he argued, could be translated as the *thing* showing or appearing. A notable characteristic of *something* (the phenomenon) appearing is suggestive of a process of change. It would move from a state of obscurity to coming into focus. The *phenomenon* therefore has a visible meaning but also a hidden meaning, and both of these meanings can have relevance for interpretation and understanding. The second dimension of phenomenology, *logos,* is translated by Heidegger into meaning "discourse, reason, and judgement" (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 56). *Logos* therefore is primarily involved in the process of analysis and is complementary to the perceptual primacy of the *phenomenon*. Therefore, Heideggerian hermeneutic thinking posits that the analysis that the researcher conducts is concerned with the deeper, latent, parts of the *phenomenon* and also the apparent surface aspects. This brings into perspective the analysis in IPA, where the part informs the whole, and the whole informs the part of the *phenomenon* (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

Building on Schleiermacher, Husserl and Heidegger, and with an eye on facticity, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) stressed that understanding should be contingent upon historical and cultural underpinning. While Gadamer posits that language is the essence through which knowledge is obtained, he also argues that not all existence can be reduced to language and that understanding of existence is contingent upon the

interpretive process (Langdridge, 2007). He reasoned that conversation was the root of understanding and saw a link between phenomenology and hermeneutics where he posited that they were jointly concerned with the process through which meaning appears (Moran, 2000). It is through the work of Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) that this notion of understanding, materialising out of discourse, is clarified. Ricoeur (1971) perceives of discourse to be spoken speech, and language a system of signs or words that make up speech. This distinction between discourse and language is critical because the analysis of language (i.e.: text) alone is insufficient for the researcher to gain deeper insight into the intentions of, and to give meaning to, the words of the speaker. It is only through the process of dialogue in discourse, and the researcher's knowledge of that discourse (that goes beyond the construction of language) that enables the researcher to explore meaning beyond words and thereby gaining a greater understanding of the speaker's intent (Langdridge, 2007).

In contemporaneous terms, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) concur that part of the aim of hermeneutic interpretation is for the researcher to better understand the participant, in addition to understanding the text. This combined understanding forms a holistic analysis where the researcher can gain a deeper insight into the experiences of the participant that may not have been apparent to the participant themselves. This is partially dependent upon the researcher and the participant sharing some common ground (Allen-Collinson, 2016). Hermeneutics thus play a central part in bringing together the philosophical phenomenological thinking and practice into the realms of understanding (Langdridge, 2007).

5.2.3 Idiography

Since interpretation of the individual's sense-making of the phenomenon is at the centre of study, it is imperative that understanding of the particular, rather than generalisation, be the focus (Sandelowski, 1996). Idiography is the detailed study of the particular within a specific context and for the apprehending of the meaning of something for a specific individual (Sloman, 1976). Each individual interview therefore is studied as a separate case study.

The case study approach therefore lends itself to the study of a single individual at a time. Idiography is of particular value in the case study environment where its peculiarity is of interest to the researcher (Platt, 1988). While it cannot prove a theory, the single-case study can identify potential flaws in existing theories which may then indicate ways in which the theory could be revised (Platt, 1988). Good case studies have

the potential to disrupt our thinking and either counter elements of our expectations, or bring to light unexpected outcomes (Campbell, 1975).

A further important consideration is that while small sample idiographic studies may not be generalisable to the broader population, it does have the potential for extrapolation at least to other cases within the sample (Alasuutari, 1995). Data saturation is therefore not an objective of IPA and is not pursued in this study (Malterud, Siersma and Guassora, 2016). At the very least, idiography could be a pre-cursor to nomothetic study where, prior to the process of aggregated analysis, detailed enquiry into the particular has the ability to inform the study.

IPA's commitment to understanding the individual's unique experiences deploys a case-by-case analysis approach and seeks to capture each individual participant's own interpretation of their experiential world. A core principle is the empathetic engagement by the researcher (double hermeneutic) in a process of co-construction of meaning (made from words, tone, emotions, silences, hesitation, gestures, and images) all interpreted in terms of the context (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). Operationalising IPA is addressed in the Methods Chapter that follows, but first I address visual methodology which I incorporated into the study.

5.3 Visual Methodology

In the process of my literature review, empirical research undertaking photo-elicitation and imagery caught my attention because of its ability to apprehend the emotive dimension of the speaker. It is of particular value in exploring the lived experience of the individual where data, other than words, could be conveyed to enrich the interview process (Warren, 2002, Warren and Parker, 2009; Del Busso, 2011). In the case of embodied occupations such as ballet, the incumbents are more aware of their aesthetic of their bodies and cognisant of the critical gaze by themselves and significant others (with decision making power). Enabling the participants, therefore, to present images at the interview that 'said something about them at work' afforded them an opportunity to engage in a richer dialogue with the researcher. It also afforded them an opportunity to address their concerns and their interpretation of their lived experience (Silver and Farrants, 2016). This is important in my study particularly because of its catalytic nature in bringing to the fore other aspects that may not necessarily surface in the course of a verbal-only dialogue. My aim was to empower my participants to actively participate in the exploration of how they live and experience their embodied occupational identity (King, Knight and Moulding, 2020). Aspects that I sought to explore were those unsayable thoughts and feelings that can be activated when the participant

and the researcher view the image(s) (Scarles, 2009). As Shortt and Warren (2012) emphasize, the photograph does not only bring with it the visual component but also elicits an "emotional-sensory aide memoire" (p. 24).

In the field of OS, however, there has been a predominance to deploy linguist-based methods such as discourse, narrative, and conversational methodologies (Bell and Davison, 2013). In particular, (Knights and Clarke, 2017; Jammaers and Zanoni, 2021) point to the fact that, because the organisation is a socially constructed verbal system, there is predominance for research to be conducted through discursive activity. Consequently, the non-rational aspects of emotion, the body, and its sensory experience and bodily aesthetic have largely been "written out" of the context in OS (Warren, 2002, p. 225). In recent times, however, there is growing evidence that visual research methods are being deployed more regularly to study such aspects as: military occupational identities (Jenkins, et al., 2008); the spatial context in relation to the experience of professional accountants (Warren and Parker, 2009); hairdressers' identities with reference to objects in a spatial work context (Shortt and Warren, 2012); and the emotive experiences in public buildings (Peltonen, 2014). The intersection of age, gender, and employment was also investigated using pre-existing photo material (Pritchard and Whiting, 2015).

In the embodied environment, senses such as visualization, smell, and touch are more primitive than the use of language (Harper, 2002). The value of these senses is that they provide opportunities to explore other sources of information (e.g.: richer, deeper, and alternative insights) that otherwise may be unlikely to surface during a verbal-only exchange (Frith and Harcourt, 2007).

From a historical perspective, visual methods have had a significant role to play in various genres of research, having had its origins in anthropology (Collier, 1957; Collier and Collier, 1986) and sociology (Wagner, 1978; Harper, 1987a, 1988, 2000) to capture diverse features of social life. Visual research methods use drawings (Vince and Broussine, 1996; Guillemin, 2004), paintings, self-portraits (Bagnoli, 2009), video diaries (Bates, 2013; Whiting, et al., 2018), photography (Frith and Harcourt, 2007; Shortt and Warren, 2012) that form part of the research exploration process by enabling the formulation of a different type of data that can enrich the outcome of research (Prosser and Loxley, 2008; Rose, 2014).

The positioning of visual research methods is no different to the word-based qualitative research methods that we would normally deploy (Pink, 2006). While the components making up the records, data, materials, and artifacts are of a visual nature, they remain as subjective as those outcomes emanating from other forms (e.g.: speech). Pink warns that the visual representations of data, experiences, artifacts, and culture are

inextricable and form an integrated set of information that needs to be addressed holistically. The context needs to be accounted for in the research process because of its influence on the participant and, potentially, on the researcher as well.

I gave careful consideration to how visual media could be incorporated into my interviews and concluded that, out of the array of possible media, the medium that would best suit my participants would be participant-led photography. This is a process whereby a photo, taken (or selected) by the participant, is brought to the interview for discussion (Harper, 2002). This conclusion was derived from considering prior empirical research conducted in adjacent fields, and that specifically deployed that method (e.g.: occupational identity (Shortt and Warren, 2012; Parker and Warren, 2017); cancer diagnosis and treatment (Oliffe and Bottorff, 2007), and (Frith and Harcourt, 2007); trauma in foster care (Rice, Primak and Girvin, 2013).

Cognisant of the potential "blind spot" in relation to the emotive elements, I considered the incorporation of participant-led photography to be an appropriate complementary method to the verbal interviews (Bell and Davison, 2013, p. 168). I took into account that ballet dancers engage in a non-verbal artform, where as a community they develop a language of their own in which they have the propensity to use non-verbal physical communication (Wulff, 1998, 2008).

A further consideration, in this context, for my motivation for selecting participant-led photography was that it gave my participant(s) an active role to play in its generation, sourcing, and selection, and that would take place prior to the interview. This gave the participant(s) the maximum amount of choice as to how they wished to participate visually, if at all (Rose, 2014). It also provided a mechanism through which the balance of power during the interview could be shared with the participant (Bates, et al., 2017). Mindful of the evocative power of images (Bagnoli, 2009), a further consideration for the use of participant-led photography was to build rapport and encourage engagement by the participant to bring the detail of *their* lived experience to the fore, thus opening up opportunities to new perspectives (Epstein, et al., 2006). I then gave consideration to incorporating participant-led photography into the realms of IPA.

5.3.1 Visual Methods and IPA

Visual methods are becoming more prevalent in the realm of IPA research in the field of health research and psychology. One of the earliest IPA studies that deployed drawings in the realm of healthcare was conducted by Shinebourne and Smith (2011). They engaged the participants with drawing during the interview process to disrupt rehearsed narratives that are a feature of addiction recovery accounts. An important

outflow of their research was the hermeneutic process enshrined in IPA that enabled the researchers to iteratively move between the verbal account and the drawings. In a similar vein, paintings were deployed to explore individual experiences of pain. Kirkham, Smith and Havsteen-Franklin (2015) emphasised the powerful benefits of the double hermeneutic where they linked sense-making of both the participant and the researcher with the paintings and lived experience.

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's (1945/1962) notion of the objective and subjective bodies where the objective body represented a separate entity visible as an image in the mirror, and the subjective body is the 'lived body', Silver and Farrants (2016) explored the embodied lived experience of mirror gazing in participants that self-identified as experiencing body dysmorphic disorder (BDD). They used a combination of IPA and photo elicitation to further their insights into how their participants lived their bodies. Participants were invited to bring pre-existing, and newly taken, photographs to the interview for discussion. This included any preliminary notes that they may have drafted in a notebook prior to the interview denoting feelings, triggered by the images, arising from their BDD. A key finding by Silver and Farrants (2016) was that their participants "viewed themselves as objects in the mirror" (p. 2654), as if detached from themselves. The participants' emotions were suppressed by their sense of dissatisfaction with their body image that became all-encompassing and overwhelming. In contrast to the Merleau-Pontian position, the participants in the Silver and Farrants (2016) case were found not to experience their bodies as 'lived' but instead experienced their bodies as 'objects'. The presence of the photos and their participants' negative reaction to those photos was pivotal in their understanding of their participants' experiences of their condition. This has relevance to my study in that ballet dancers find themselves in studios surrounded by wall-to-wall mirrors where they constantly gaze and critique their object bodies (Alexias and Dimitropoulou, 2011; Green, 1999).

This approach to incorporate visual media such as drawings, photography of objects, or images that individuals had collected or made themselves, combined with an *a priori* process of thinking about the topic under discussion further enhanced the interviews and data collection process. This differs from studies requesting participants to draw images during the interview process, in that the former gives the participant an advanced opportunity to evaluate what they wish to include and exclude from the interview process (Bartoli, 2020). This *a priori* opportunity also served to engage participants in a sensory embodied experience in preparation for the interview. Participant-led photography also avoids the complication of considering drawing competencies that may influence participants to engage or not (Burton, Hughes and Dempsey, 2017).

In relation to identity, IPA and participant-led photography were jointly deployed to study self-identified hoarders as they link significant personal possessions to self-identity or the identity of others (Kings, Knight and Moulding, 2020). The photographs in Kings, Knight and Moulding's (2020) study were instrumental in the participants sharing their identification with objects as being part of who they are. Their emotive reactions to the images formed part of the data informing the analysis, and without which, the accounts may not be as rich.

The images provided alternative and additional data points during the interviews, together with the opportunity to bring to the fore the more emotive aspects of my participants' accounts, convinced me of the value of deploying a combination of IPA and participant-led photography.

5.4 Limitations of Methodology

IPA is categorised as being part of the broader qualitative research methodologies and, as such, will be subject to the critique that qualitative research receives in general. Amongst these limitations I will highlight the most salient issues. Firstly, the quality of qualitative research is substantially dependent upon the researcher's skills, and biases. As such, it is more difficult to maintain and assess rigour (Anderson, 2010). In general, analysis of qualitative data is known to be time consuming, and this is particularly notable in the realms of IPA despite the small samples involved. It is the iterative and layered depth of analysis and interpretation that is so time consuming within IPA (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

From a scientific community perspective, qualitative approaches are often critiqued, primarily for their lack of generalisability (Creswell, 2013). The maintenance of confidentiality and anonymity in the process of presenting findings can also be challenging (Anderson, 2010).

Turning specifically to the critique of IPA, the most fundamental criticism has been levelled at its degree of phenomenological basis. Willig (2008) argued that IPA is limited in that, while it explores the understanding of participants' experiences, it does not investigate the root cause of those experiences. Both Chamberlain (2011) and van Manen (2018) have also debated the phenomenological nature of IPA, and while they all acknowledged elements in support of its claim, they argued that it is not phenomenological enough to be considered phenomenological in essence. In an earlier rebuttal to a challenge from Chamberlain (2011), Smith (2011) stressed that the principles on which IPA is based (including hermeneutics and idiography) and, in

particular, upon the works of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, it is substantially enshrined within the realms of phenomenological philosophy.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) stresses that IPA is concerned with how a phenomenon is experienced by an individual in a specific context rather than about 'cause-and-effect'. IPA takes exploration beyond the surface of the objective body and investigates the subjective lived body with a view to understanding the individual nuances of a phenomenon. The value of IPA, therefore, lies in delving down deeper to the subjective level of meaning-making, and understanding of the phenomenon, that could be the basis for further research to discover the root cause(s) of those experiences.

Additionally, IPA has been critiqued for being language-centred and Willig (2008) makes a strong case that "language can never simply give expression to experience. Instead it adds meanings that reside in the words themselves and, therefore, makes direct access to someone else's experience impossible" (p. 67). I concur to some extent if one attempts to analyse the text alone without taking into account the broader dynamics of the dialogue between the participant and the researcher. It will, then, be very difficult to understand someone else's experience. It is only through the process of dialogue in discourse (Ricoeur, 1971) and the researcher's knowledge of that discourse (that goes beyond the construction of language) that enables the researcher to explore meaning beyond words, and thereby gaining a greater understanding of the speaker's intent (Langdridge, 2007).

From a practical perspective, criticism has been levelled at IPA in respect of the competencies of the researcher and participants to communicate with adequate language skills in order to elucidate the nuances of their experiences (Willig, 2008). However, this is a consideration for qualitative research more broadly, and language skills must be considered fundamental to carry out good interviews generally. Being a non-native English speaker myself, I was acutely aware that for both myself and for some of my participants, who were non-native English speakers themselves, of the potential for the *loss in translation* (van Nes, et al., 2010). However, a mitigating factor was that all of my participants and I shared a very influential grounding in our vocational education and the international nature of classical ballet jargon and culture facilitated conversation (Wulff, 2001). This limitation for non-native speakers could be ascribed to qualitative research more broadly where it is dependent upon language skills and is not necessarily a specific limitation of IPA alone (Kvale,1996).

Linguistic competency in the language in which the study is being conducted is an important consideration to ensure that both the participant and the researcher can adequately apprehend the meaning (as opposed to just the words) of the lived experience that they are exploring (Willig, 2008; Smith, 2011). Furthermore, it has been

suggested that IPA could be seen as "elitist" in that only those who can express their lived experiences eloquently should be included in a study (Tuffour, 2017, p. 4). Despite this criticism, the extent of uptake of IPA, beyond the realm of psychology, would suggest that most individuals are able to communicate aptly for the purpose of most studies. Importantly, the skill of the researcher to phrase and re-phrase questions to explore deeper meaning is at the essence of good IPA (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

IPA studies are characterised by their small sample size. While this enables the researcher's in-depth exploration on a case-by-case basis in pursuit of the particular, IPA's small sample size has been criticised in respect of its generalisability beyond the context of the single case or, at best, beyond the participant cohort (Noon, 2018). However, the purpose of IPA studies is not to address a broad, shallow, descriptive sample but to focus on a narrow sample permitting greater depth of analysis of each account (Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). In terms of its generalisability, Sandelowsky (1996) argues that the generalisation that is possible from small sample studies relates more to the "idiographic confluence of variables" (p. 527) that can influence wider populations. Stated otherwise, the observations within each case will have divergences and convergences. Convergences and divergences across cases will inform the outcome more broadly. This specific interpretation of generalisability is of particular relevance to IPA studies owing to the motive for the studies being exploratory, in particular of under-researched topics, rather than definitive in nature (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009).

A final reflection is on the homogeneity of the participant sample required in IPA studies. I carefully considered the elements that are homogenous in my sample as well as the diversity. From a homogeneity perspective, all of my participants identified as professional ballet dancers in elite ballet companies. All of them had undergone formal vocational ballet training prior to taking up employment.

There were, however, characteristics amongst my participants that may be considered diverse. The range of these characteristics were necessary given the nature of my study. In order to address my topic appropriately, a range of ages was necessary to be included, if the influence of age was to be studied in a cross-sectional study. Also, both males and females identify as professional ballet dancers in well-defined gender roles (Wulff, 2008; Pickard, 2018). Otherwise, they are united in their identification in a common occupation. My study sought to explore how both male and female dancers lived their occupational identity where I sought to identify convergences and divergences. Therefore, in my study, both age and gender were not considered functions of diversity in terms of sample selection. These parameters could, however, be considered a limitation of my study in that not all participants shared gender and age

commonalities. In the field of sports, both male and female participants encountered similarly lived experiences (Markula, 2015), and I would argue therefore that, in the context of my study and the occupation more broadly, these participants can be considered homogenous despite their age and gender differences (Smith, et al., 2017).

5.4.1 Visual Research Limitations

A primary consideration when incorporating visual media in the thesis documentation, particularly in a small sample scenario and where the occupation is narrow and identifiable, is the risk of participants, and locations, being identified and outed (Warren, 2017). Accordingly, I have addressed this requirement and detailed my actions in the Method Chapter that follows.

A second important limitation when incorporating images into the interview process is to guard against the conversation focusing too heavily on the content of the image(s) (Meo, 2010). While the conversation was largely participant-led, I had to ensure that I kept the conversation focused on the aims of the study.

Some aspects relating to the generation and inclusion of images are important to consider. Firstly, the scope and content of the image(s) will be dependent upon the choices made by the operator behind the lens. This may or may not be of value, therefore, to the study in the interview. Secondly, participants may be pre-disposed to not wanting to share visual material relating to themselves or their workplace(s) for various reasons including avoidance of recognition, fear of reprisal if identified, and their feelings relating to the messages encapsulated in the photo(s) (Frith and Harcourt, 2007).

From an ethical perspective, I had to consider the copyright implications in relation to the images, as well as the potential for individuals identifiable within the image to have granted consent before including such material into my study (Wiles, et al., 2008). Further interests relating to limitations are reflected upon in the ethical considerations addressed in the Method chapter that follows.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I addressed the methodological considerations for my study. Following a short review of the history behind IPA, I addressed my motivation for and the suitability of this methodology, to the aims and objectives of my study. In particular, I addressed phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, with a focus on their relevance to IPA and the considerations in my study. I included a section on

methodological limitations and how I addressed them in the course of my research. Having included participant-led photography during the course of some of my semi-structured interviews, I addressed the motivation, characteristics of, and limitations related to the inclusion of imagery in research. In the chapter that follows, I address the method that I deployed as it relates to the methodology addressed in this chapter.

6 Chapter 6: Research Method

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I detail the method that I deployed commencing with my research questions and objectives relating to them. This was followed by considerations relating to ethics and gaining access to an appropriate participant sample. Then, I address the recruitment process which includes planning and carrying out the interviews. My study includes visual methods and I address the approach taken to the inclusion of participant-led photography and the related ethics issues specific to their inclusion. I conclude the chapter by detailing the data collection and analysis processes.

6.2 Research Questions

In deciding on a method, I needed to consider the nature of the study that I was undertaking. I firstly had to take into account the fact that my study is in the realms of Organisational Psychology and embedded in Organisational Studies (OS). The study is, however, specifically focused upon the embodied lived experience of professional ballet dancers who perform their daily task through their bodies that have been crafted for purpose. Ballet is a full-time remunerated occupation, but poorly understood as work (Kelman, 2000). What we do know, however, is that ballet is the most physically demanding of the performing arts, is a non-verbal artform, and communication is performed predominantly through the medium of body language, movement, and emotion (Homans, 2010).

In the literature review in Chapter 3, I found that both the constructivist and social constructionist approaches shared the limitation that the lived experience, sensations and feelings of the individual are largely under-represented. I sought to address this gap through the objectives related to my research questions as follows:

- How do professional ballet dancers experience their embodied occupational identity?
- How does ageing influence the lived experience of being a ballet dancer?

The objectives that I set for these research questions are to:

- develop a deeper understanding of ballet as employment/work
- address an under-researched embodied occupation in the OS literature
- give my participants voice in the context of an otherwise silent occupation embedded in a hierarchical sub-culture characterised by rich, and deep, artistic traditions

- explore how my participants live and experience their '*ageing'* bodies in the context of an otherwise youthful body-centric occupation whilst in their chronological prime.

With these objectives in mind and given the embodied nature of the subject of my study, I needed an approach that would be sensitive to the context, the particular, the individual experience, rather than the aggregates and averages of their occupational identities. Accordingly, as discussed in Chapter 5 above, I selected IPA as the most appropriate method to capture the idiographic and experiential aspects of my participants lived experiences. In the sections that follow, I discuss the recruitment of my participants, interviews, and data collection, and the analysis process deployed to address my research questions. My method included voluntary participant-led photography during the interviews, owing to its ability to apprehend elements of the non-verbal lifeworld (Kings, Knight and Moulding, 2020). In this chapter I also address ethical considerations and actions that I undertook to ensure the interests and wellbeing of my participants, in addition to the limitations addressed in the Methodology Chapter above.

6.3 Ethics

My study received ethical approval from the Department of Organisational Psychology at Birkbeck, University of London, in 2015 (Appendix A).

The primary concern for me was the wellbeing of my participants and their comfort and satisfaction with being part of my research study. Accordingly, I accommodated my participants in terms of their interview venue preferences, date and time that best suited their schedules. I fully appreciated that all of my participants needed to understand the nature of the study and their rights in terms of the University's regulations. During my initial contact with each candidate, I ensured that they were provided with the Research Project Information Sheet (Appendix B) that contained all of the information they needed before making a decision whether to participate or not. This Research Project Information Sheet explained the nature and purpose of the study, the format that the interviews would take, any observations that may relate to the study, and consent requirements. Candidates were alerted to the voluntary inclusion of participant-led photographic images, and that all interviews would be digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Participant anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained in accordance with the University's regulations. Measures agreed with my supervisor, including the use of pseudonyms for participants, the masking of names and locations of ballet companies and institutions, and the pixelation of parts of photographs were implemented during the compilation of this thesis. All candidates were made aware

of the nature of the counselling support that was available to participants and contact details of appropriate organisations were also included. Candidates were reminded that they were entitled to withdraw from the study at any time.

Although care was taken at the start of the project to address my position as a researcher, particularly with my insider knowledge of the ballet world, I did not fully appreciate the emotional impact that the process would have upon me. During the course of the project, I was affected emotionally by some of my participants' accounts and immediately sought professional support to address the issues. In the process of continuing with the project, I maintained a reflexive journal that informed the basis of a separate reflexive chapter in this thesis.

I was aware that the data collection process will result in me having to travel to various destinations within the UK, and that all of the venues for meetings and my own accommodation had to accord with my own welfare and safety.

I deal with ethics related to the images that would form part of my study in a separate section below and adjacent to the discussion relating to my deployment of visual methods in my study.

6.4 Recruitment of Participants

6.4.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

In line with the requirements of IPA, I sought to recruit a purposive and relatively homogenous sample related to my research questions (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009; Kidd and Eatough, 2017). The critical issue for me was to define what exactly it was that made the sample homogenous. Factors that informed the homogeneity of the group include interpretive considerations relating to the variation that can be tolerated in the analysis of the phenomenon, and practical considerations relating to access to relevant participants with a view to the rarity of the phenomenon under study (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). The commonality that defined the core characteristics of my participants was that they were all vocationally trained ballet dancers working, or having worked, in UK elite ballet companies and they all socially identified as being ballet dancers.

Consequently, the criteria set for the selection and recruitment of the participants were as follows:

1. All participants would have been professionally trained at a recognisable vocational ballet school and would have accepted a contract of employment with an elite ballet company in the UK that had been in place for more than 6 months at the time of the interview. In other words, the sample was drawn from

only those ballet dancers who have had employment in the mainstream classical ballet companies and who had undertaken vocational training in order to equip themselves to become professionals. The training that ballet dancers would have received, in itself, would potentially have also had an impact on their identity construction, and is therefore an important criteria in their recruitment.

2. Ballet dancers ranging from age 18+, and at differing stages of career development, all the way through to post-performance career-phase were included in the sample in order to capture experiences that may be different at various stages of their careers. This approach was deployed as an alternative to the ideal of having a longitudinal study to address the various stages of each individual, but, in the context of my study, this was not practically possible.
3. Rank within the companies was a desirable criterion that influenced the range of participants recruited. In order to investigate how the level of seniority may have influenced their lived experiences of the occupation, participants from an array of ranks within the companies were recruited.
4. While gender diversity was not the core focus of my study, I endeavoured, where possible, to recruit both male and female participants in each career phase. The purpose for including both genders was to investigate any salient differences that could be identified and could have an effect on their experience of the occupation.
5. Professional ballet is multinational in its construct, but the range of ethnic diversity remains very narrow with few exceptions. In my study, all the participants were Caucasian.

6.4.2 Access

The restrictive nature of, and control over, the activities of ballet dancers within elite ballet companies had a material impact on my gaining access to active dancers in particular. Further complicating factors were the demanding schedules of rehearsals, performances, and national and international touring commitments. As a result, while candidates were willing to take part, work commitments and ever-changing rehearsal schedules often resulted in multiple rescheduling and, in some instances, complete withdrawal. Ultimately, 12 interviews were carried out. This is commensurate with the small sample nature of IPA studies (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) and satisfied the range of criteria set. The ratio of male and female dancers (3:9) in this study is broadly representative of the general proportion of men and women in the ballet world (McEwen

and Young, 2011). All of my participants were recruited directly as individuals independent of their employer(s). The rationale for recruiting from more than one elite ballet company was to control for the dominance of the cultural influence of any one particular organisation.

6.4.3 Recruitment Process

The purposive nature of the recruitment criteria required that I approached only those possible candidates that would meet the requirements. My principal approach was by word- of-mouth, adopting a "snowballing technique" (Gobo, 2004, p. 419). However, in order to elicit wider participation, the 'Dancers Career Development' (DCD) advertised an invitation to participate in my research to their members. Both of these methods resulted in securing appropriate participants. As previously noted in Chapter 4, I specifically excluded those dancers with whom I had either a direct professional or friendship relationship in order to prevent the possibility of 'group think' (Breen, 2007) or partisanship.

In the interest of transparency, I prepared a Research Project Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix B) that was made available to all interested candidates at the first point of contact. A summary of the 12 participants is presented in the table below:

Table 13 - Participant Characteristics

Participant Pseudonym	**Sex**	**Tenure at Interview** (Years)	**Transitioning Age*** (where applicable)	**Age at Interview**	**Rank****
Audrey	F	14	Early 30s	39	Principal
Beatrice†	F	1	-	18	Artist
Clara†	F	12	-	31	Principal
David†	M	17	Mid-30s	40	Principal
Fiona†	F	2	-	21	Apprentice
John†	M	18	-	36	Principal
Maria	F	23	-	42	Principal
Nelly†	F	30	Late-40s	51	Principal
Patricia†	F	16	-	35	Soloist
Sandra	F	7	-	26	First Artist
Tracy	F	18	Early 40s	48	Principal
Victor	M	28	-	47	Principal

Notes: †Denotes participant brought photographs to the interview.
*: Transitioning age shown as approximate to preserve participants' anonymity.
**: Further details of these ranks are located in the Ballet Context chapter (Chapter 2).

6.4.4 Interview Planning

One-to-one semi-structured interviews were planned in two phases, namely: an initial pilot study, followed by the main data collection interviews. All interview arrangements were conducted by exchanges of emails/text messages and/or phone calls to set the date, time, and venue. Interviews with participants were scheduled at their convenience in order to accommodate the participants' requirements.

The interview provides the participant with a voice needed to close the researcher-researched power-distance gap, and to build trust and confidence so that they would welcome me into their world (Hubbard, Backett-Milburn and Kemmer, 2001). I experienced the inverse of the widely held view that the researcher has a greater degree of power vis-à-vis their participants. I felt that the participants had significantly more leverage over access and what they were willing to discuss. I had to be totally flexible in relation to dates, times, locations, and venues that they were willing to consider. When it came to the content of the interview, my approach was to hand over as much power to them to influence the narrative but kept an eye on the broader issues to be addressed in relation to my research questions. In general, I felt that I was able to balance the dialogue in favour of my participants accounts.

During the preparatory stage, I sent each participant the Research Project's Information Sheet (Appendix B), and Participant Consent Form for their consideration (Appendix C). I also extended to them an offer to forward a sample of the typical questions that I would ask of them during the interview. However, none of the participants availed themselves of this offer. All participants were advised of the visual component of the study which I deal in more detail in a separate section below. In all cases, the participants signed the consent form acknowledging that they were made aware of these facts in the Research Project Information Sheet (King and Horrocks, 2010).

The interview venue was chosen by my participants and ranged from: their homes; the Birkbeck PhD meeting room at the Clore Management Building; coffee shops of their choice usually near the theatre where they were performing; or, on the rare occasion, at the companies' studios or their dressing rooms. The reason for this flexibility was to provide the participant with as much privacy and comfort as possible, knowing that they would be free from interference, or curiosity, from other ballet dancers, colleagues, or company management.

My approach in relation to my participants was to engage with them on a friendship basis with which I felt more comfortable, having previously been a ballet dancer myself. This involved treating my participants with a degree of warmth to establish

rapport and inviting them to dialogue with me in an exchange so that, through mutual exploration, we could uncover those deeper meanings to them. This friendship-based interviewing approach is recognised as a method that overcomes the approach where the interviewees are seen as only a source of data and where the humanity is acknowledged in the process (Oakley, 1981).

6.4.4.1 Pilot Study

A pilot study with one participant was originally planned in order to test my interview design (Willard and Lavallee, 2016). Specifically, I sought to address style, length, and structure of the interviews (Creswell, 2013). I also wanted to explore how rapport with my participants would be best approached given my preferred friendship-based orientation (Oakley, 1981). Furthermore, I wanted to evaluate the suitability of the questions in order to determine their ability to elicit rich and deep descriptions from the participants. In addition to descriptive and narrative questions, I sought to include contrast, circular, and evaluative style questions that could serve both as prompts and probes (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The nature, structure and style of the interviews is detailed in the main interview section below.

A further dimension that needed to be assessed was the inclusion of participant-led photography as part of the interviews (Rose, 2016). I needed to establish whether or not this would be feasible in first place, and whether it would enrich the process or prove a distraction. I also wanted to evaluate the extent to which data from this source would be ‘different’ from verbal-only interviews (Clark-Ibañez, 2007).

The quality of the data collected and the richness of the pilot interview were discussed with my supervisor and, having met expectations, this account was included as part of the final study.

6.4.4.2 Interviews – Main Study

Each interview started with a rapport-building warm-up question related to how the participants started out, or selected, ballet as a career. Taking a semi-structured interview approach (Smith and Osborn, 2008), I prepared a number of questions that would aid the natural flow of the conversation but, at the same time, provided some guidance so that the key areas for exploration were not inadvertently missed. This was particularly valuable in the early stages as it enabled me to gain experience and confidence with the questioning technique (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). The interviews lasted on average two hours each. These interviews were of a conversational nature that facilitated the exploration of the participant’s account. This meant that, at times, the

conversation could veer off the topic, enabling the co-exploration of areas meaningful to my participant (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

Underpinning my interview schedule from the limited previous research in this field (e.g.: Roncaglia, 2007), my questions were designed to encourage my participants to share their lived experiences in as much detail as possible and in relation to how they lived their occupational identities. How the influence that age and ageing may have had on those experiences was also explored. The set of structured open-ended questions comprised a series of descriptive, contrast, comparative, and evaluative questions to explore the basic level of enquiry. I then deployed prompts (e.g.: *Can you tell me more about that?*) and probing questions to explore the deeper meaning (e.g.: *How does that make you feel?*) (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Lasting between 1:30-2:00hrs, the interviews were carried out over a period of 10 months as a result of the constraints surrounding the availability of the participants.

In advance of each of the interviews, participants were provided again with information relating to my study contained in the Research Project Information Sheet (Appendix B). A participant's Consent Form (Appendix C) was presented for signature to each participant prior to the commencement of each interview. I also reminded them of the support services that the DCD (Dancers Career Development) provides and that they could be approached for any information or counselling support that they may require. DCD had been previously made aware of my research project and provided me with their contact information that was included in the Research Project Information Sheet for the participants.

Participants were also reminded that they could choose to answer, or not, any questions posed during the interviews. They were also advised that they could request that the digital recorder be switched off at any point during the interview and, if they chose to do so, they could withdraw from the interview process at any time (Kvale, 2007). None of the participants opted for any of these options. Each interview concluded with the participant being offered an opportunity to discuss any further issue, or topic, that they wished to elaborate on.

6.4.5 Visual Methods

Prior to each interview, I requested that my participants voluntarily identify or create photographic images (2 or 3 photos) that '*said'* something about themselves at work, making use of their own choice of device (e.g.: digital camera, tablet, or mobile phone). I deliberately left the brief broad and thereby positioning my participant(s) as the expert(s) in relation to the images that they presented. I reasoned that participant-led

photography would lend itself to active involvement by my participants and to confer a pivotal role on them (agency) in the interview dialogue (Prosser and Loxley, 2008). Indeed, while I conducted semi-structured interviews, the design of my questioning facilitated the direct influence that my participants would have over the flow and direction of the interview, but within the bounds of the scope of the study (Bolton, Pole and Mizen, 2001). Not all participants chose to include photographs at the interviews.

Those participants who brought photographs to their respective interviews spoke about each photograph in an order of their own choice and at a time that they felt appropriate to introduce them into the conversation. I encouraged them to describe what those images meant to them at work. Depending on the photo, and the nature of the conversation that ensued around the photo, participants were asked further questions and the questions and answers were transcribed and analysed as part of the entire interview. Participants' consent was sought at the outset, and they were reminded that the images would be used for academic purposes. Some images were pixelated to preserve participants' anonymity (Silver and Warrants, 2016).

Besides the primary objective for including the photographs to facilitate deeper discussion of sensitive topics, I anticipated that they would serve as good 'ice-breakers' (Epstein, et al., 2006) and lend a richness to the conversation that verbal dialogue alone would not be able to capture (Bolton, et al., 2001). The focus around these images was to explore both the tangible and visible aspects related to the images, but also the underlying intangible meaning they had for my participants (Clarke-Ibañez, 2007). The images also facilitated the exploration of those more emotionally sensitive areas that could elicit reflexive consideration (Banks, 2001; Bagnoli, 2009). The inclusion though of visual images in my study brings about considerations in relation to ethics and further limitations which I address below.

6.4.6 Visual Research Ethics

In this section, I address those additional research ethics issues that relate specifically to visual content and that have to be borne in mind concomitantly with the broader ethical considerations. Firstly, and in line with the general requirement for consent, my participants were informed of the inclusion of visual media (participant-led photography) in my study and its role in the research process (Silver and Farrants, 2016). In particular, they were informed of their choice, but no obligation, to discuss the photos during the interview. They were also advised that, at any time, they could withdraw the right of use of the images in the research documentation.

Throughout the process, I have been aware of the need to ensure anonymity as far as possible of my participants' identities both with regard to text and visual media. I made every effort to ensure that their rights were maintained in terms of their privacy and dignity (Warren, 2018). Given the personal and sensitive nature of the topics under discussion, I was also aware of the need to protect my participants' wellbeing, and in this regard, I ensured that they were reminded of the support services of the Dancers Career Development (DCD) and other pertinent industry-related institutions.

Every effort would be made to ensure my participants' anonymity and confidentiality as far as possible. For transparency, I also made my participants aware that, since the thesis was likely to be published, aspects of individual data would be in the public domain and that there was a potential for its re-use for academic purposes.

6.4.7 Data Transcription

As part of my engagement with the data, I recognise that transcription was part of the interpretative process (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) and so, I undertook all the transcription processes myself (Willig, 2008). All the interviews were transcribed verbatim, a task that felt at times that it would never end. I used a combination of the 'Express Scribe' software and the 'Infinity' foot control pedal to improve productivity and pace. During the transcription process, I made use of the following symbology:

[…]	Signifies editing out unnecessary material
[text]	Clarification comments or non-verbal expressions
…..	Signifies pauses or silences
Bold	Words emphasised by participants
Italics	Used to draw attention to words or concepts in the transcript

6.5 Data Analysis

IPA has a defined approach that, while not prescribed, informs the analysis process (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). In general though, the iterative processes involved in reading and re-reading the transcript alongside note-taking form the foundation upon which IPA analysis is based. Idiography is one of the three pillars of IPA and informs the process whereby each participant's account is analysed in detail and separately to identify emergent themes (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). In this thesis, I adopted the terminology inherent in the Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) textbook edition. I am, however, cognisant that the terminology has been adjusted for the 2022 edition of their text but I have taken their advice not to adjust the terminology at this stage

of my study. The remainder of the process is generally oriented to traceability from the themes back to the originating source data.

All digital recordings were transcribed into Microsoft Word, and then formatted into a three-column table (within Word) to facilitate the recording of themes (left column), numbering of the lines of transcription of text (centre column) and recording of notes and observations (right-hand column). Transcripts were analysed individually and completed the cycle in order to meet the idiographic commitment of the IPA method before progressing to the next interview (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). My analysis was carried out for each individual transcript in the following manner:

6.5.1 Reading and re-reading to immerse oneself in the data

The first step was to immerse myself in the detail of the data but, more importantly, in my participant's world by reading and re-reading the interview whilst listening to the recorded soundtrack. Along the way I took into account notes that I had made immediately after the interview and recorded the most pertinent issues alongside the text (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). This process was particularly beneficial in that it refreshed my memory of the dialogue during the interview taking place, along with the tone and emphasis placed on specific issues by the participant. This also provided me with an additional source reference points for me to ensure that I was focused on understanding what the participant was saying rather than interpreting my participants' interpretation based solely on the text.

6.5.2 Initial noting

The next stage for me was to carry out a line-by-line reading (Larkin, Watts, and Clifton, 2006). This step was important for me to examine the transcript to gain a deeper understanding of the semantic content and language. This exploratory process requires an open mind wherein anything of interest was recorded from the transcript. At this stage, I needed to be cautious to focus on what the participant was in fact saying and not to use their words to trigger my own reflections on the topic. I made initial descriptive notes adjacent to the transcript with exploratory comments and insights with each subsequent reading (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). As the process developed, I noted more semantic elements related to the language used which progressed to a more interpretative conceptual noting orientation, leading to more abstract considerations in terms of the participant's sense making of their experience. This iterative process invariably led to further questions being raised that provided deeper colour to my participant's experience. The process often led to self-introspection and reflection based

upon my past experience of the occupation and I had to record these in order to distinguish clearly between my own experiences and those of my participant.

The method of noting that I used was to leave descriptive comments in plain text, linguistic comments in *italics*, conceptual notes underlined, and personal reflexion annotated in blue. An extract example of this initial noting is available below.

Table 14 - Initial Noting for John - Original page(s) 2-3 – lines: 25-30

Note: where the participant emphasised his speech, words are shown as bold in the quotes below

Transcript Quotes	**Initial Noting** (descriptive / *linguistic* / conceptual / Reflexive)
John: In the [elite ballet company], for me, it was a **fantastic experience** because I watched all of the dancers as if *they were from another world*!	His admiration for more seasoned colleagues was huge. At such young age (16) he was star struck when he joined the company. *His use of the metaphor "they were from another world" reflects admiration and respect for the established dancers in the company but also how far away from them he perceived he was at the time of joining the company..* A multitude of meanings conveyed in this passage transcending different phases of his initial years in ballet. Respect is big in the ballet culture both for your predecessors (because of their knowledge and experience that they hand down) and also for established peers who perform superbly.
That's how **I** saw them…	That's how **he** perceived them at the time. *The reinforcing statement exemplifies his degree of admiration for his established colleagues.* In doing so, he places distance (respect) between himself and his senior colleagues.
I had millions of photos of [principal ballerina]…I recall that when I was at ballet school I did 'The Nutcracker' and she performed the 'sugar plum [fairy] and I had a photo with her *where I reached her waist*….[chuckles] and…	He admires [principal ballerina] [she was a colleague of mine at ballet school]. *John* reflects very warmly on his earliest encounter, being on stage, as a child with his ballerina idol. He recalls being small, reaching her waist, and importantly looking up to her. He had a similar sense when he first joined the ballet company: looking up to the established dancers. *The language that he uses describing his extent of admiration is exemplified by the exaggeration of the number of photos he held.*
….then I have another photo where [years later] we are both dancing together and she always laughed…..*I ended up dancing with her*…[more chuckles]	*His choice of language describes how he achieved his goal [ended up dancing with her].* *Words interspersed with chuckles sound as if mixed with child-like innocence and pride.* *John* achieved his objective of being like his idol ballerina and achieving figuratively the same height or status. By dancing with her, he had achieved equal status with her. This, without a doubt, was a very emotive and proud moment for *John* in his career.

6.5.3 Developing emergent themes

In this step, developing emergent themes, the double-hermeneutic comes to life in the process where the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant's sense-making of their experience. It is an iterative process of interpreting "the parts in relation to the whole, and the whole in relation to the parts" (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012, p. 367). I interrogated my notes, and at times the interview data, to identify emergent themes that were then condensed and recorded in the leftmost column adjacent to the relevant transcript text.

At this stage of the analysis, the focus has shifted from the detailed transcript of the participant's words and becomes a co-production that incorporates my interpretation of my participant's sense making. This process proceeded in an iterative hermeneutic circle, maintaining the complexity whilst reducing the detail (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

An example of the process is reflected in the table below where each stage of the process so far is depicted. At the end of the analysis of each transcript, the emergent themes were transferred to a spreadsheet to facilitate further analysis to identify connection across emergent themes across transcripts.

Table 15 - Developing Emergent Themes for John - lines: 25-30

Note: where the participant emphasised his speech, words are shown as bold in the quotes below

Themes	**Transcript Quotes**	**Initial Noting** (descriptive / *linguistic* / <u>conceptual</u> / Reflexive)
Feeling special Respect for more experienced colleagues.	*John*: In the [elite ballet company], for me, it was a **fantastic experience** because I watched all of the dancers as if *they were from another world*!	His admiration for more seasoned colleagues was huge. At such young age (16) he was star struck when he joined the company. *His use of the metaphor "they were from another world" reflects admiration and respect for the established dancers in the company but also how far away from them he perceived he was at the time of joining the company..* <u>A multitude of meanings conveyed in this passage transcending different phases of his initial years in ballet.</u> Respect is big in the ballet culture both for your predecessors (because of their knowledge and experience that they hand down) and also for established peers who perform superbly.
Elevates his more experienced colleagues' status.	That's how <u>**I**</u> saw them…	That's how <u>**he**</u> perceived them at the time. *The reinforcing statement exemplifies his degree of admiration for his established colleagues.*

		In doing so, he places distance (respect) between himself and his senior colleagues.
Looking up to her as a skilled professional in the work context. Reaching up towards a higher level of achievement.	I had millions of photos of [principal ballerina]…I recall that when I was at ballet school I did 'The Nutcracker' and she performed the 'sugar plum [fairy] and I had a photo with her *where I reached her waist*.…[chuckles] and…	He admires [principal ballerina] [she was a colleague of mine at ballet school]. John reflects very warmly on his earliest encounter, being on stage, as a child with his ballerina idol. He recalls being small, reaching her waist, and importantly looking up to her. He had a similar sense when he first joined the ballet company: looking up to the established dancers. *The language that he uses describing his extent of admiration is exemplified by the exaggeration of the number of photos he held.*
He arrives at that higher level.	….then I have another photo where [years later] we are both dancing together and she always laughed…..*I ended up dancing with her*…[more chuckles]	*His choice of language describes how he achieved his goal [ended up dancing with her].* *Words interspersed with chuckles sound as if mixed with child-like innocence and pride.* *John* achieved his objective of being like his idol ballerina and achieving figuratively the same height or status. By dancing with her, he had achieved equal status with her. This, without a doubt, was a very emotive and proud moment for *John* in his career.

6.5.4 Searching for connections across emergent themes

When the process of identifying emerging themes across the entire transcript had been completed, I created a 'potted summary', resembling an abstract of a paper, highlighting the key aspects and essence of what I knew about the participant from the transcript. I then set about establishing connections between themes and clusters of themes. At this stage, further refinement involved the identification of stronger and weaker themes depending upon the strength of the underlying evidence base. After eliminating the weaker themes, I then deployed a number of processes including abstraction (putting like with like), subsumption (a number of emergent themes combined into a super-ordinate theme), contextualisation (how the themes relates to a particular context), function (themes that depict a purpose within the transcript, e.g.: ageing; fear; vulnerability) and in some instances numeration, and then, bringing together and organising these themes according to patterns and connections (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). I then arranged the remaining themes into clusters that then become constituent themes within the super-ordinate themes within each transcript. See an example for *John* in the table below.

Table 16 - Super-ordinate and Constituent Themes for John

Note: where the participant emphasised his speech, words are shown as bold in the quotes below.

Super-ordinate Themes Constituent Themes	**Illustrative Quotes (and line nos.)**
Pursuing Perfection	
Ballet as transformative	*"In the [elite ballet company], for me, it was a **fantastic experience** because I watched all of the dancers as if they were from another world! That's how I saw them!! I had millions of photos of [principal ballerina]. I recall that when I was at ballet school I did 'The Nutcracker' and she performed the Sugar Plum fairy and I had a photo with her where I reached her waist….[chuckles]… then I have another photo where [years later] we are both dancing together and she always laughed…..I ended up dancing with her…[more chuckles] " (L. 25-30)*
The body as an aesthetic object under surveillance from self, and others	*"… for me, the perfect dancer's body "has to be" (and he gesticulates that "has to be" should go between inverted commas) someone…well…. [chuckles and shrugs] not all of us are like that but…eerrhh…has to be slim, with muscles but elongated muscles ……so that they can form beautiful lines because this is very important." (L. 297-298)*
The Complexity of Reflecting in the Mirror	
Body as a tool	*"[chuckles]…well…it [my body] is my tool, my work tool, so I try to maintain it in the best possible way…I go to the gym, I try to be strong, to look good….**that's very important**…I watch what I eat, not because of weight issues but because I am focused on eating well like proteins ….[…]…Thought needs to go into this…I **always** take good care of myself…I need to be well…" (L. 314-323)*
The artist within	*"…to be a ballet dancer, for me, is…is to be the person who studied ballet and has a preparation and can dance …he can dance, has the technique, perhaps he has a [certain] physique…everything that is a ballet dancer. But an artist…[pause] is totally different …because an artist is going to be someone who has all of the above that is necessary to be a ballet dancer but is going to have something extra that…that would draw others' attention to them, even where there are fifty others around them. …When a person really **feels** what they are doing, delivers a very different type of energy…so…it reaches you…[…]…because **an artist** is something that **comes from within**." (L. 178-185)*
The Disrupted Self	
Proving his worth	*"… the choreographer was trying to do things... she wanted to try that the girl jumped like a plane and landed on one of my arms...and it worked well a million times…but the choreographer asked us to repeat it **SO, SO,** many times that my arm could no longer stand it…So, she [the dancer] threw herself and then we heard **gggrrrrrrr**…..[a tear or ripping sounding noise coming from his arm] and,*

	*because I am tough and can withstand quite a bit of pain…I've said '**carry on…carry on**….**throw yourself again'** but soon after that I felt **very** unwell." (L. 240-245)*
The body made itself heard	*"Then the choreographer said 'lets' take 5 minutes' so I sat down…but when I attempted to stand up again…I could not lift my arm…. I realised that something odd had happened…and I realised that quite a bit had gone wrong…the bicep did not get torn, but all of the ligaments around the shoulder joint and the joint itself got pulled and dislodged...I could not do anything with that arm…nothing at all…" (L. 246-250)*
Indissoluble link	*"I [pause] am going to be a dancer **always**. What I **love**….what I **see**… **will always stay**…. whether I can do it or not…It's always going to be with me" (L. 278-279)*
Competing with the younger self	*"...People say that it does not show…but **I see it**. I see it because… your back is stiffer, the stamina is wavering…everything takes more effort, so one has to go to the gym to maintain everything in good shape, and it helps me to feel better. Previously, when I was a principal at 18…I never went to the gym…I did nothing…and I had heaps of energy, my body felt a lot more flexible…and because my body was a lot more flexible then, I didn't have these tight, stiff muscles….I don't' know…**everything was a lot easier**! (L.324-335)*
Compensating for a lost younger self	*"**Nooooo…here…noooooo**…once the dancer feels that they.….but there is no rule that at 42 years of age you have to compulsorily retire…[…]….because the maturity that mature dancers offer can be wonderful. They offer different works. There is no reason for them to do Balanchine variations…" (L. 377-395)*
Age, the intruder in the house: the subjective lived body vs. the objective seen body	*"…everything was a lot easier! Maybe it was easier because I did not have to think about these things…I don't know [shrugging his shoulders]… but now I think about it all the time…..because I feel stiff and I have to do a lot of stretching and massages to keep up…as you get older, particularly for boys, you start feeling it in your back because of having to lift and partner the ballerinas …you feel it in your back…that [the lifting] takes a toll on your back and, at the same time, we have to remain flexible to do an arabesque …and all of those things…so…with the passing of the years, I feel that the flexibility in my back has changed a bit but…yes, I feel it [he rubs his back]…" (L.335-338)*
The 'older' aching body appearing into consciousness	*"… **Look**….you do a performance one night…go to bed and the next morning…you try to get out of bed and you are crippled…you can hardly walk (he chuckles)….but that's normal. Well, I say it is normal, but I suppose that it is not normal for someone who has not lived that. The point is that when I was younger, I did not feel any of that. I could dance regularly but did not feel any of this…" (L.339-341)*

6.5.5 Moving to the next case

When moving to the next transcript, it was incumbent upon me to endeavour to ringfence the ideas emanating from the first case, avoiding transference to the next case. This is a challenging process that required discipline and skill of me to avoid carry over ideas from the earlier case. The objective that I had was to identify new themes from each new case (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). I embraced the IPA's stepwise process as far as possible to bring to bear the rigour of the IPA method to facilitate the identification and development of new themes.

6.5.6 Looking for patterns across cases

When all of the transcripts had been analysed, the next step for me was to identify patterns occurring across the transcripts, identifying similarities and divergences. I had identified 171 themes and 35 clusters across 12 transcripts. At this point, it was important to establish how a theme in a particular transcript informed a situation in another transcript. The next task was for me to identify which of the themes were most "potent" (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009, p. 101) with subsequent re-evaluation and re-configuring in terms of similarities and differences that brought about some re-naming and re-labelling of themes to align more closely with the broader observations from the transcripts, closing the part/whole iterative process (Cassidy, et al., 2011). Those themes and clusters not meeting the potency threshold were discarded.

The final task in this process required that I generate a table showing the connections for the transcripts as a whole with nested themes and super-ordinate themes in order to explore even deeper levels of interpretation which would inform the ultimate findings of this research project. I concluded with three super-ordinate themes, each with between two and three constituent themes shown in the table below.

Table 17 - Super-ordinate and Constituent Themes for 12 Participants

1. Pursuing the Dream	**2. Mirror, mirror on the wall…**	**3. On the other side of the curtain**
…On a Different Plane to the Rest of the World	Body as a Tool	Shades of Passion and Sacrifice
Choreographers Want Blood!	The Artist Within	The Ultimate Betrayal Ageing - The Reluctance Pas de Deux The Final Curtain
Pursuing the Idealised Body		

The above process informed my analysis for all 12 of my participants which I detail in the chapter that follows.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I addressed the research questions and their objectives along with ethics and access considerations. I detailed the recruitment process and how I addressed the quality and rigor by carrying out interview planning processes, a pilot study that informed the main study. I addressed how participant-led photography contributed to the data collection and analysis, along with ethical considerations specifically related to the inclusion of visual methods in the data collection processes. The data management processes, including the transcription and analysis, were detailed and it is this six-stage process that informs the steps taken in the Findings Chapter that follows.

7 Chapter 7: Findings

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I addressed the method that I deployed to identify my possible interview candidates, select appropriate participants, structured the data collection process and prepared the data for analysis. I also addressed how the analysis was conducted and the process leading towards the identification of super-ordinate themes and their sub-themes. In addition, I provided anonymised summaries of my participants' profiles.

In this chapter, I present and analyse my findings that have been arranged across three super-ordinate themes. The first super-ordinate theme, '*Pursuing the Dream',* addresses my participants making sense of their pursuit of the aspirational balletic identity. I then address the related topic '*Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall….*' where I investigate my participants' individual experiences of their social interaction with balletic society and the role that the object-body plays in that process. The third super-ordinate theme, '*On the Other Side of the Curtain'*, extends the debate to my participants' experiences of their lived bodies and the subject-body's role in their identity construction. At the end of each super-ordinate theme, I summarise the key findings.

My participants described three different bodies that they lived: the socially constructed idealised body; the object-body that they work on, through and with; and their subjective-body that is the manifestation of the body as it is lived by the individual. Central to my analysis are the tensions that exist between the idealised body, the visible and tangible object-body, and the unseen but lived subject-body.

In the process of addressing the tensions between these three notions of the body, I have deployed participant-led photography within my data collection and analysis processes. The analysis including visual data provides an opportunity to capture more than what one can present discursively. This is owing to the images enabling the participant and me to apprehend elements of the non-verbal lifeworld, the context in which my participants work, and the ambiance that predominates their understanding of their world (Boden, et al., 2019). The voluntary nature of participation to include photography at the interviews gave my participants voice where they had agency to choose what elements they wanted to include in the co-production of meaning-making. This enhanced the relevance to them and balanced the researcher-participant power during the interviews (Silver and Farrants, 2016).

The table below summarises the super-ordinate themes and their constituent sub-themes:

Table 18 - Super-ordinate Themes and Constituent Sub-Themes

Super-ordinate Themes	Constituent sub-themes
1. *Pursuing the Dream* (Idealised body) It's the muse, an unattainable but inspirational drive towards perfection *"…this kind of dream school that like I couldn't even visualize, kind of like Hogwarts or those kind of...like '**oh my gosh**, does this place exist?" (L. 62-64) Beatrice (18 F)*	• On a Different Plane to Rest of the World • Choreographers Want Blood! • Pursuing the Idealised Body
2. *Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall….* (Object body) *"…an artist is going to be someone who has all of the above that is necessary to be a ballet dancer but is going to have something extra that…that would draw others' attention to them, even where there are fifty others around them…" (L. 180-183) John (36 M)*	• Body as a Tool • The Artist Within
3. On the other Side of the Curtain (Subject body) *"In the past I would have repeated it, and repeat it, and repeat it until it became **a second skin and it would work**. Now I don't…now I can't… now I have to have **faith**." (L. 698-699) Maria (42 F)*	• Shades of Passion and Sacrifice • The Ultimate Betrayal • Ageing - The Reluctance Pas de Deux • The Final Curtain

7.2 Pursuing the Dream

This super-ordinate theme captures my participants' sensemaking of their experiences in pursuit of the mystique surrounding being a classical ballet dancer. This is arranged in three sub-themes. I commence with '*On a Different Plane…*' where my participants reflect on their hopes, dreams, and expectations of what becoming a ballet dancer meant to them. The second sub-theme, '*Choreographers Want Blood'* reflects on how my participants experienced the demands of the organisation on them in pursuit of their dreams. The final sub-theme, '*Pursuing the Idealised Body',* explored how my participants made sense of the socially constructed idealised ballet body.

7.2.1 On a Different Plane to Rest of the World

This sub-theme was important to all my participants and was something that they were passionate about during the interviews. Many of them spent a significant amount of time during the interviews talking in a detailed manner about their training and how it felt to them to be in this special place. To them, the perception of ballet being a "*different world, separate from the rest*" and a place where they felt "*special"* was a significant aspect in their accounts. Being recognised by others as being different from the rest (e.g. having talent; passing a rigorous selection process; meeting the Queen) was significant to them and was a key aspect that shaped their occupational identity.

Most of my participants enthusiastically shared having a deep desire to become a ballet dancer. A couple of them, however, did not know what ballet was about at the time they joined ballet school (aged 11), or what they were getting into. Amongst these accounts though, there were nuances where participants found ballet to be "*glamorous*"; "*boring*"; and one even "*hated*" it.

Apprehending the most salient accounts, this theme commences with the portrayal of one of my participant's sensemaking of her experience of entering full-time vocational ballet school. For *Beatrice*, ballet was an extra-mural weekly activity that she enjoyed but only saw it as fun. Things became more serious when she was identified by others as "*having potential and talent in it*" (L. 31-32) and her teacher handed her a form to complete for an audition for an associate junior course at an elite vocational ballet school. She recalled how both she, and her parents, had no idea what she was getting into:

> *"I had no idea what it was before they gave me the form and then I started to find out bit by bit more and more about it. And it was just seeming like this kind of dream school that like I couldn't even visualize, kind of like Hogwarts or those kind of...like '**oh my gosh**, does this place exist?' And then like, I don't know, as you do when* you're *a child you just get very excited, like 'oh no, I could get in' like you know 'why couldn't I', you don't really think of all the.... you know there's so many people that didn't get in for this reason, or that reason or that reason. So yeah that was amazing." (L. 61-72) Beatrice (18 F)*

Arriving at vocational ballet school for the first time, *Beatrice* described it through a visual metaphor revealing her sense of emotion and just how awe struck she felt with what she saw ("***oh my gosh***, *does this place exist*?"). As a contrast, she reflects, albeit fleetingly and through the eyes of a child, on her fate and that of other children that auditioned but that, unlike her, did not get in. Her feelings about the magic of the school were momentarily disrupted. She started but did not finish the sentence about them [the children that did not get in]. It was as if she would now allow herself to have those feelings

that were in such sharp contrast with her excitement about the wizardry and magic that she felt about the school, that she could not even bear to utter the words. And then, perhaps attempting to shelter herself from those sad feelings, or the school being nothing else but magic, she focuses on her own outcome, counts her blessings, and moves on. The grandeur of the school's setting, her sense that this is a place where magic happens and the fact that she was one amongst the few that were selected, would have had a resounding influence on her sense of being and confidence. From the outset she observes the competitive nature of the environment. Gaining entry, and wanting to stay part of this special place was her primary objective:

> *"But also, I think… because I found it so easy to get in I didn't realise how much harder it would be to get the things I wanted later on as well, which is why I found [vocational ballet school]* ***really*** *hard. Like, I don't know, it was hard being away from your family but it's also hard to learn their ways, and it was really strict,* ***just everything****, like the academics, the living, the boarding." (L. 72-76) Beatrice (18 F)*

Beatrice contrasts how relatively easy it was for her to be offered a place at vocational ballet school versus living and surviving it. Her repetitive refrain as to just how "*hard"*" everything was for her is indicative of the ballet sub-culture and the drive for high performance and even perfection ("*learn their ways"*). Reality had set in, and the magic had lost some of its shine. The hard slog demanded began. Nevertheless, being able to train at that particular ballet school was "*special"* for her (L. 244), outweighing the sacrifices of being away from her family and '*just everything'* else.

Commencing at a later point in his career, and recounting the specialness of his professional career's early days, *John* found himself working alongside his ballet idols:

> *"In the [elite ballet company], for me, it was a* ***fantastic experience*** *because I watched all of the dancers as if they were from another world! That's how I saw them!! I had millions of photos of [principal ballerina]…I recall that when I was at ballet school I did 'The Nutcracker' and she performed the Sugar Plum fairy and I had a photo with her where I reached her waist.…[chuckles]… then I have another photo where [years later] we are both dancing together and she always laughed…..I ended up dancing with her…[more chuckles] " (L. 25-30) John (36 M)*

There is a kaleidoscope of meaning encompassed in this passage. There is his star-struck perception of the established dancers in the company, that he just joined, against whom he feels diminutive. This, I connect, with his childhood photo that he describes, where standing next to his ballerina idol, he is this small, waist-high, child. This contrasts with his rapid development within the ballet company where he soon finds himself dancing with his ballerina idol, and now he is no longer the diminutive dancer but equal to the stars that he held in such high esteem. He chuckled, we chuckled, and

continued talking. As he interspersed words amongst the chuckles, his words sounded as if they were peppered with a combination of innocence and pride. All of this amounted to a '*fantastic experience'* for him.

This sense of '*specialness'* was also vividly captured by *David* when he reflected on his experiences as a ballet dancer. His initial encounter with ballet was attributable more to him being babysat whilst his sisters were engaged in extramural ballet classes. Proving a thorn in the side of the dance teacher, she involved him in activities which led to him loving it (L. 66). He was "*hooked by the mythical stories*" that the teacher told, and the "*attention he was getting*" (L. 67-71), a sense that did not diminish as he became a seasoned professional:

> *"**I was shy about it** but it wasn't me receiving the applause, it was 'David', the 'David dancer' you know, and that was great, I used to love it. The adoration, the standing ovations, Oh my God! I used to soak it up but I was still a very, very, shy person……it's very odd…yeah it is hard to describe"" (L. 737-741) David (40 M)*

David describes his personal experience of his balletic identity in relation to his self as a dualism. That part of *David* that receives the "*standing ovations*" felt outside of himself. He consciously singles out '*David, the dancer'* from '*David, the self'* almost as if they were two different people. The "*David self*" is consciously hiding timidly behind the costume and make-up of '*David, the dancer*' who receives all the adulation, as if protecting himself.

When *David* made sense of the earlier experience he deployed a clear distinction between the very shy person he is and '*David, the dancer*' inferring that any adulation was not part of the '*David, self*':

> *"… it's a bit of an out of body experience… that you feel totally separate from the rest of the world. And this comes back to that exclusivity, 'the rules of society don't apply to me, I am on a different plane to the rest of the world'. It's funny, really funny. And you can't help but feel a little…'superior' is the wrong word, but because you are in this 'exclusive' place… you get to meet the Queen, you get to mix with the great and the good… and all the rest of it and **they hold you in high regard** – you can't help but feel **special**…" (L. 867-878) David (40 M)*

Paradoxically, in this passage, the '*David, self*' appears to become one with '*David, the dancer'* and separate from the rest of the world. Embracing the aspirational balletic identity and gaining access to the occupation had a transformational effect on *David*. He relished in the separation and radiance that the (ballet) world conferred on him, and where he enjoyed the admiration of senior members of society, absorbing the tension and simultaneously hiding behind the façade of the ballet dancer. He derives comfort in this unity where he can be in the social world despite his shyness.

However, not all of my participants felt that ballet was a special or exclusive place. Both *Audrey* and *Victor* diverge. *Audrey* had been identified as someone that "*could do very well*" as a ballet dancer and was "*given numerous opportunities that others did not have*" (L. 66).

> *"I started ballet quite young, so probably 5 or 6 or something like that. Really **hated it** and so quit after a month or two and didn't go back to it for years. I found it really, boring, **really, really** boring. …[…]… I wasn't sort of excited by sort of like the imagery stuff, I was more interested in the physicality, I was quite a physical kid, and I just thought as a form of exercise it was quite boring really, you know….like as a way of moving…it was quite boring at that age." (L. 5-18) Audrey (39 F)*

What connected *Audrey* to ballet was not the aspirational identity but the physicality that she enjoyed. Ballet itself, however, was not something she had a specific interest in. Quite the contrary – just how deep her sense of boredom was for the craft is reflected in the number of times that she repeats these sentiments across the passage above. What moderated her disposition was her natural congruence with the idealised ballet aesthetic and the recognition by others of her potential. It was also the attention and opportunities that she was given along the way that drew her back, aged 14, to ballet after having drifted (L. 53-55). Her sense of being constrained by ballet's single-minded dedication went against her broader interests:

> *"…you know, I had a lot of interests and I just felt really stymied in pursuing those other interests. But at the same time kind of knew that I had this potential, was stubborn enough that I knew if I worked hard I could reach that potential, but was probably a little grumpy with it…" (L. 301-304) Audrey (39 F)*

There was a discernible tension between the *Audrey* with broader interests, and the *Audrey* with an innate talent for classical ballet. Whilst she had a distaste for the single-minded focus of ballet and was indifferent to the ballerina image, she relished the attention that she received based on her talent. She had to weigh this up against the sacrifice of her broader interests and, despite her dissatisfaction with being constrained, her giftedness for ballet won her over to the career. While she had good and bad times along the way according to her wider account she never truly embraced the ballerina image, and then, being caught in that tension, she ultimately left the occupation to pursue wider interests.

Victor is a somewhat different case in that he was confronted with narrow choices at a very young age, and made a selection for the lesser of two evils:

> *"I started dancing because my sister was doing it and my mother chucked us in the same class …and… eerrm…somebody in the local dance school spotted me and I*

became a RAD scholar, and then from that…somebody then said 'he should audition for '[Junior Division Vocational Ballet School]. And, at the same time, I was quite musical and I got a…a choral scholarship. So, it was either go and be a chorister and do music, or…eeerrm…..and ballet seemed more glamorous….Well, just because it means you can show off!" (L. 13-24) Victor (47 M)

What is not obvious from the transcript of this passage is the extent of *Victor's* emotions as he shared his experiences. *Victor* inhaled deeply and loudly as he recounted how his mother "*chucked*" him and his sister into a class at the local dance school. His sense of being treated like an unwanted object shone through. That was followed by sighs, short pauses, and uneasiness that were manifestations of his feelings surrounding family-related issues at the time.

While a number of my participants fully identified with the balletic identity and felt that they were transported to a special place on becoming a ballet dancer, this sentiment did not hold for all of them. The hard work that followed, and the implications for my participants, are addressed in the following sub-theme.

7.2.2 Choreographers Want Blood!

Spanning their vocational ballet training years, through to their professional lives as company members, this sub-theme captures a number of my participants' embodied experiences at the hands of the choreographers (a metaphor for the teachers, artistic directors, choreographers – essentially the ballet establishment or gatekeepers). The experiences that my participants describe in the quotes below reveal the methods that the gatekeepers impose on them to bring about their unquestioning acceptance and compliance with their demands.

I start with a quote from *Beatrice*'s account where she reflects on her willingness to put herself through '*a year of hell'* in order to make the grade from junior school (aged 15/School year 11) to senior school, illustrating her determination and drive to succeed at all costs:

"…Year 11 was like really tough just because I had a really, really tough teacher. She was one of those people that knew how to approach every different student, so give them the best, get the best out of themselves. But also, I guess, in her mind she knew the ones that would end up like dancing, and the ones that would go into different paths but although they hadn't gotten there yet – do you know what I mean? So, she pushed everyone in the right direction, I think, for them. And for me, she gave me a year of hell because she knew I was capable of doing better." (L. 188-194) Beatrice (18 F)

Within the ballet context, being *given hell* and receiving a lot of attention is considered very positive. *Beatrice* acknowledges this when she says "….*at least [I] have some attention, rather than nothing at all"* (L. 230). She emphasises categorically the toughness for her receiving this treatment from a demanding teacher, acknowledging that she felt that this was for her own good. Conveying a sense of her inner challenge to meet the high standards set by her teacher suggests a symbiotic interplay between student and teacher where unpalatable methods are accepted as necessary to advance the cause. The strength of *Beatrice*'s desire to become a professional ballet dancer dictates her willingness to accept her teacher's behaviour unquestioningly.

Elaborating on her '*year of hell'*, *Beatrice* highlighted the approach that the teacher took by instilling fear in her:

> *I think maybe for the first few months I was just really scared. You know when sometimes people teach out of fear, and then you're like 'OK' and you just like hold everything in and you're just like 'I can't do this wrong, don't do it wrong please'. (L. 217-219) Beatrice (18 F)*

Measuring her response, *Beatrice* expresses her sense of inner fear that she felt at the teacher's demand for higher performance, to the point that she engages in a soliloquy, pleading with her body, as if it were something separate from her, not to let her down. Her fear of making mistakes is indicative of a culture that does not tolerate error which, in the context of ballet schooling, serves to feed the demand for perfection. Having to *grin-and-bear-it* was her way of responding to the pressure, suppressing her emotions in order to ensure that she progressed.

This teaching approach of instilling fear into the hearts of young students was further exemplified by *David*'s recollection of the first week of his first year in full-time junior vocational ballet school:

> *"…. Eeerm…getting the exercise wrong more than once and being physically picked up by the neck….with one hand…and thrown out into the corridor…and….and…and….having purple bruise marks on the neck for the rest of the week. Eeeerm….being in a coaching lesson where you are all standing like squads in the Army facing the mirror with your arms in 'a la seconde' eeerm…and not being allowed to move for 15-20 minutes, while the teacher scrapes her 10s down the shoulder blades and repeats it one after the other until there is…Well, eerrm… one of my friends walked out, he had blood dripping down the back of his shoulder blades. And being* ***furiously shouted*** *at – one of the boys in my class was eerrrm…he started crying because, you know of the pain, and you know he obviously just wanted to go home – this was our* ***first week, aged 11****, and she was shouting at him, calling him a girl 'maybe this isn't right for you, why don't you just*

> ***pack up and go home you little girl****'. That boy is a principal with [elite ballet company] right now [David nervously laughs] so he stuck it out, all credit to him. […] **Frightening stuff**, **absolutely frightening** stuff. There are **different** ways of doing things and bringing out the confidence in a student…eerrm…[silence]….so yeah I learned a lot by that. I got through it… you know…. eemm the other side." (L. 179-206) David (40 M)*

Offering vivid details, *David* spoke about how his cohort of 11-year-olds experienced unbridled fear at the hands of an adult teacher whilst they were in an environment, away from home, where they were already feeling vulnerable. Moments earlier, *David* told me that in his new role, he had "*learned what **not** to do in terms of discipline*" (L. 162) and was keen to put the topic on the table. However, that contrasted with the number of hesitant *eerrms* across the passage in his delivery. From the indirect examples that he cites (e.g.: '*one of my friends*….'; '*one of the boys*…') I infer that these events remain raw and somewhat out of bounds for him to verbalise in a closer, more direct, way. Noticeably, it is only during the latter part of the passage that *David* let us into what can be interpreted as how *he* felt about it all when he eloquently thinks aloud about the events he has just described, calling them '***frightening stuff, absolutely frightening** stuff'.*

Using a more direct and personal '*I',* he asserts the ironic benefit that *he* gained from the treatment despite the fear and distress that he endured. Evocative of *David*'s determination and resilience is his '*[I] got through **it'** and his* emphasis on the '*it*' is suggesting of his preference to recall these events at arm's length, thereby depersonalising them. *David*'s use of the metaphor 'the *other side'* is suggestive that he went through a dark tunnel before emerging out of the impossible place he was in. Such was the impact of these experiences that they stayed with *David 'through life' (L. 209).* He mused that the discipline and values needed to be instilled in people, need not be effected through the medium of fear (L. 210-211).

Joining the senior division of full-time vocational ballet school aged 16, and coming from a smaller city in England, *Patricia* found fitting in with the discipline on the one hand, and the established student culture on the other, difficult. She felt totally unprepared for what was to come:

> *"…and the thing is that they...they never tell you any of this!...they make you feel such an outsider! You know…I felt **SO** out of place...it was just **awful**…eermrm….so that was all through the first year (16 years old) when I had **the worst time**. It was ridiculous how I did not get assessed out. They said, you know, is not on behaviour but on talent… so you are here for another year…so I said OK. So… I stayed and mm…yeah…so when I joined [elite ballet company]… the mmm …I won't say his name… the assistant director told me 'Good luck at [elite ballet company] because*

[Assistant Artistic Director there] does not like you' so he warned me of this…." (L. 115-122) Patricia (35 F)

Struggling between two selves, her previous outsider's individuality and the collective insider balletic identity, *Patricia* describes how she was subjected to organisational pressure to embrace the school's required disposition and behaviours that did not come naturally to her. Her talent, however, saw her through, but the school warned her that she was on notice. The pressure did not end at ballet school. When she was offered a contract with the associated ballet company, the cultural pressure was applied again in an effort to mould her behaviour closer to their ways, using threats and fear to rein her in. Throughout the passage *Patricia* speaks of '*they'* in respect of the organisation as if to keep them at arms' length, far away from her. As if she was still fearful of them all these years later, she would not utter the Artistic Director's name for fear of reprisal. In order to retain her place *Patricia* moderated her behaviour to comply with what they sought of her. However, she did not fully identify with the organisational culture. She feared them. Now, viewing this from an adult's perspective and looking back she observed:

*"No….you don't [know when you are 17 years old] …you just go on everything that they say…**really bad**….**I was totally petrified**…" (L. 136-137) Patricia (35 F)*

The spectre of what she anticipated was about to happen to her terrified her, and she had no way of knowing (at 17) just how real those threats were; as such, she had to take them at face value. The hierarchical and authoritarian nature of the organisation precluded her from any agency and left her vulnerable and fearful.

This sense of having little or no control over one's fate is daunting for the dancers. *Nelly*, having had experience of dancing with multiple elite ballet companies in the UK and Continental Europe, had her own thoughts on this issue:

*"I would say very little control. I think dancers… I think times have changed now… which is **g o o o d …** and I think that dancers…[long pause]…it has always been very difficult for dancers to have a voice… because the …..Ultimately, it has always been the Director's decision and I could quote that "**it is my decision, I am the director**". (L. 185-188) Nelly (51 F)*

The forthrightness of *Nelly's* initial response was contrasted with the vacillation and hesitation of the words that followed. She appeared to be contrasting her timid younger self with the bolder self of some of today's young ballet dancers. However, whilst initially suggesting that there has been change, she then reflected and reverted to her original position. This vacillation is revealing in itself. It was as if *Nelly* would have liked to have been bolder, but she was explaining, and in the process justifying, how hers and

others agency is taken away from them. At the end of the quote, she moves the spotlight from her to a director, revealing just how vulnerable dancers are to the power of hierarchical structures and authority. This dependence, in turn, renders their careers and occupational identity rather fragile.

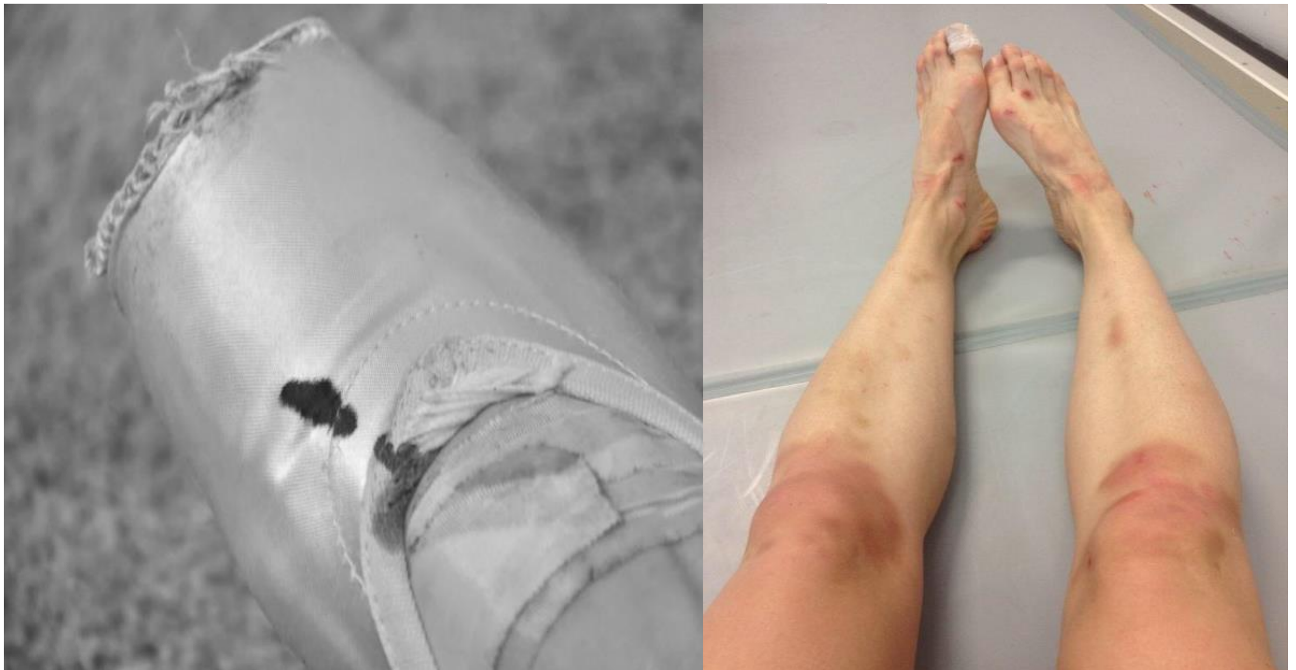
Dancers' careers are dependent on the attitude that the ballet hierarchy have towards them. Professional ballet dancers working in elite companies face '*being taken out of a ballet'* if they are not perceived by the choreographers, or the directors, not to be giving their utmost:

> *"…the choreographer also has a vision and want it to be 100% in every rehearsal otherwise they don't want you there. So, again, if you are not giving them 100% they don't want you there, and then you get taken out of a ballet. So…it's all…it's tricky…it's tricky to manoeuvre…. a lot of the…I mean, the* ***choreographers want blood*** *because they want* ***the best!****." (L. 576-580) Nelly (51 F)*

Nelly's use of the metaphoric '*choreographers want blood'* epitomises the greedy demand of the organisation demanding more, and more, all the time, even if that means objectifying the dancers to attain their objectives. At the same time, this speaks to the fragility of the ballet career and the ongoing vulnerability of the dancers. *Nelly's* repetition of the choreographers' demands for 100% commitment is indicative of the weight placed on that unwavering commitment and unquestioning dispositions required to survive in the craft. Her repeated hesitation and reference to this issue being '*tricky'* reflects her concern about verbalising the specifics and she hedges the topic. This is indicative of her ongoing fear, even after retirement, of the hierarchy. The fragility of the dancers' tenure and the constant requirement for a nod of approval from the choreographer inferred in the passage above, epitomises the continuing culture of uncertainty and fear instilled in the dancers to maintain compliance and high performance.

This constant high-level demand on performance is bound to lead to desperate measures. The images below, by *Clara*, show more than words can say about what *Nelly* was describing.

Figure 2 - Clara's Rehearsal Injuries



The image on the left relates to a particular rehearsal where *Clara* was appealing for relief to mark the rest of the rehearsal given how tired she felt. She elaborated:

> *"…I felt nothing, but my feet were like… sort of burning. I was **very** tired and wanted to mark the rest of the rehearsal. [The choreographer] didn't want to do that but agreed to a short break. Eermm… it was when we started the second half of the rehearsal and sometime into it that [the choreographer] called my name and asked me to come forward to speak to me more closely. I thought to myself what have I done now? …as I got closer to him, I followed his eyes thinking 'Is he going to tell me off or something?' but as I got closer and closer I realised that he was looking at my pointe shoe…I did not realise that my foot was bleeding and blood had gone through the satin…..he agreed that I could take it off now. I don't know exactly why I took the photo before taking my pointe shoes off but I did. Maybe because I didn't feel that my foot was bleeding. I don't know. In any event, the choreographer then allowed me to continue marking until the end of the rehearsal. Phew! what a relief!!" (L. 274-284) Clara (31 F)*

As if to suppress, or even silence, the messages from her exhausted body, *Clara* declares initially feeling '*nothing'* and then *others* the parts of her body that are '*burning'* and '*very tired'*. Here is where *Nelly's* metaphoric use of '*the choreographers want blood'* takes an embodied turn. The irony is that with her feet *othered* from herself, *Clara* could not dance, yet she persisted, responding to the choreographer regardless of the cost to her body. Powerfully positioning himself between the dancer and the dance, the choreographer effectively diminished *Clara* as a person, objectifying her in the process.

The choreographer did not relent to her request to mark the steps, until he literally saw blood.

As if in a trade-off with her body to dance a coveted role, *Clara* subjected herself to the choreographer's demands, overriding her body's call for rest. Such was *Clara's* subjugation that, when summoned by the choreographer, she immediately assumed wrongdoing on her behalf. Taking the photo of her bleeding foot may infer that *Clara* felt a need to evidence her marking for the rest of the rehearsal, perhaps a way of justifying to herself that she was not being lazy. It was not clear to me whether her motive for bringing the photos for discussion was a roundabout way of asking for help, or whether she was demonstrating to me her commitment to the artform. Either way, what was on display were injuries to her body – readily recoverable as they may be.

The figure on the right above shows *Clara's* leg bruises following a rehearsal session:

"I woke up with legs looking like this [showing me the photo Figure 2]. My role, Tatiana, gets thrown about quite a bit in Onegin [she chuckles]. It was such a wonderful experience to learn it with [choreographer's name]. I've read the Pushkin's book. Tatiana, I love it, she is such a passionate, meaty character, I love it!!! The music is so beautiful too, you immerse yourself in it and in the character. I became Tatiana. I did not feel anything until the following morning. I could not believe it! and could not put any weight on the bruises for a few days…had to ice it, I ***hated*** *the ice…* ***too*** *cold!!….and could not fully rehearse for a few days….occupational hazard, I suppose! [shrugging her shoulders with resignation]" (L. 293-300) Clara (31 F).*

The trade off and sacrifice of *Clara's* body continues as if the duality involved in the objectification of *Clara's* bruised limbs, and their separation from herself, enables her to cope with the situation. While *Clara* hates the coldness of the ice on her body to care for the bruising of her legs, she directs her focus onto the character she loves, and embodies, as if to endeavour to escape the pain from the bruising. *Clara's* legs did not feature in her conscious account until she saw and felt the bruises the following day. Conspicuously, her feet, presumably not as sore as her legs now despite the skin rawness captured in the image, are not mentioned. The rest of her body, presumably not hurting as much, does not feature either. *Clara* normalises the situation with the bruising to her limbs inferring that she is, to some extent, aware of the sacrifices she is making but resigns herself to the expected ('*occupational hazard*') exchange. Trying to make sense of *Clara's* sensemaking, I speculated as to whether she saw this conversation as an opportunity for her to have voice through me.

Both the individual, and the organisation, engage in a process of objectifying the body in order to drive towards the achievement of their respective objectives. A factor

that underlies this objectification is the notion of the idealised body towards which both parties are striving.

7.2.3 Pursuing the Idealised Body

In one way or another, all of my participants referenced the 'right body' for ballet. This entails the aesthetic and functional stereotypes, the physical attributes needed for an art form based on narrow ideals of physical perfection, weightlessness and ease of movement, and appearing effortless. The notion of the 'right body' for ballet elicited a wide array of emotional responses from my participants. In this section I analyse these responses that range from describing the 'right body' as empowering, a gift to predestined individuals from nature or a higher order, all the way to those that expressed hatred towards their bodies and a range of factors in-between such as perceiving this romanticised 'right body' for ballet as a 'creature', or 'an alien'.

Providing an insight into the power that her body gave her, *Nelly* exclaimed as follows:

> *"…it was seen that…eerm…I was probably quite good, and that I had a talent there, and probably…physically absolutely right for ballet. So, I was taken into the top class at [vocational ballet school] …so that was **fantastic**, to be able to rub shoulders with other girls who were very, very good…" (L. 117-121) Nelly (51 F)*

Nelly does not advance a description of what the ideal ballet body might look like, but points to the power that her body, being "*physically absolutely right*" for ballet, conferred on her. Hedging the issue, and initially addressing herself in the third person, her initial demure choice of words contrasts sharply with the more exuberant ones that followed. She switches to self-affirming her superior talent, identifying herself in the process with students in the top set. Elaborating on how this felt to her, as a 16-year-old, *Nelly* said:

> *"Mmmm [thinking]...It felt great, **it felt like as I was taking on the world!** You know…and I wanted to…I didn't…I was…eerrmm….I never felt smug about anything, you know. I probably never realised that I was that **good**, it's only now when I look back on videos I think…**WOW**!" (L. 127-131) Nelly (51 F)*

Despite the contrast between her hedging and endeavouring to moderate her position, in these two quotes above, *Nelly* was strongly empowered by the aesthetic that her body conferred on her, reinforced by feedback that she received from significant others (L. 117). Her ability to claim the balletic identity was thus premised upon her general sense that her bodily aesthetic epitomised the idyllic form. Driven by this feeling

of self-assurance and feedback, she felt so empowered that she could compete with the best, and she did.

Whilst *Nelly* ascribed her success as a ballet dancer to having *"an absolutely right for ballet*" body, *Beatrice* considered having the 'right body' for ballet a biological gift determined by genes, something bestowed upon certain individuals. She drew a distinction though between having the 'right' body and having the right talent:

> *"…you kind of just have to be lucky to get all the way through because it's just genetics. Which is quite sad, it's not like talent, it's just genetics and it's something you can't control." (L. 969-970) Beatrice (18 F)*

Bodily aesthetic, *Beatrice* posits, derives from pre-determined '*genetics',* something that she argues is uncontrollable by the individual. By inference, talent is within the individual's control. In so doing, *Beatrice* unveils a tension between the visible (aesthetic) and the invisible (talent). One could therefore infer that talent remains invisible until the dancer starts moving and performing. *Beatrice* implies that ballet dancers being judged purely on the genetic gift of aesthetic, and not more holistically, is unfair.

Following on the notion of the 'body as a gift', *Clara* assumes an apologetic stance at the outset as if she were attempting to ameliorate the sharp comments that followed. She sees having the 'right ballet body' as something '*granted', a* gift from a higher power, bringing to life the degree of importance placed on the form, shape, and aesthetic that is at the very essence of the visual storytelling medium that epitomises ballet.

> *"…. For me, and that's why I say that I am very conservative. Classical ballet is beautiful because of certain characteristics: physical – granted by God, granted by nature – and if they are not present… [she shrugs her shoulders] …For me, that's the way it is…for me… that's the way it is. It is cruel sometimes…" (L. 191-193) Clara (31 F)*

Clara and *Beatrice* represent the opposite ends of the career continuum, holding similar views in relation to the notion of the body as a gift, whether genetic or otherwise. The 'right body' gift is a pre-requisite and remains something beyond the control of the individual and society. *Clara* adds two further aspects that relate specifically to ballet. Firstly, she highlights the narrow beauty parameters acceptable to her for classical ballet to deliver its '*conservative'* beauty. Secondly, she laments that the absence of these attributes cruelly excludes those that have the talent but do not conform to the aesthetic ideals of classical ballet. By implication then she argues that aesthetic conformity to her the overriding characteristic required to claim balletic identity.

Emphasising the importance of the body being able to create 'beautiful lines' in classical ballet, *John* offered a somewhat detailed definition of what constitutes the perfect dancer's body and, simultaneously, a glimpse into his own self-perception:

> *"… for me, the perfect dancer's body "has to be" (and he gesticulates that "has to be" should go between inverted commas) someone…well…. [chuckles and shrugs] not all of us are like that but…eerrhh…has to be slim, with muscles but elongated muscles ……so that they can form beautiful lines because this is very important." (L. 297-298) John (36 M)*

Chuckling and shrugging with modesty, his disposition contrasted with his emphatic requirement for the '*perfect dancer's body*' to be comprised of specific characteristics. Through the combination of his expression, language, and his hand movements, he sketched the shape that the human body plays in the construction and depiction of the forms and '*beautiful lines'* that are required to bring about the balletic images that are central to the choreographic message.

Later, while analysing his account, I glanced at one of the photos that *John* advanced (Figure 3). As if in an epiphany, but as part of my hermeneutic circle, *John's* words came alive as I recognised the very bodily characteristics that epitomised the 'ideal ballet body' to be present in him, as reflected in the image above. However, his self-perception was that his body did not fully meet those ideals ('*not all of us are like that'*). While his body, with its elongated muscles, does produce '*beautiful lines'*, his self-critique leaves him uncertain as to its ability to meet the idealised form. This dissonance leaves *John* in a state of vulnerability.

Figure 3 - John's Balletic Lines

Self-identifying as not possessing the idyllic ballet body and having had to overcome the initial ballet sub-culture's social resistance to progress in her career, *Sandra* rejects the notion outright that ballet is '*just about a body type'* (L. 431) and expressed her frustration with the ballet world being so fixated on a specific idyllic ballet body type:

> *"…I wasn't chosen because of my body, and I feel so passionately that dance is…it's not a sport, it's not about who can kick the highest, who can turn the fastest,* ***it's an art*** *and it needs to be the* ***whole package****." (L. 424-426) Sandra (26 F)*

Contextualising ballet as the artistic embodiment of a vocabulary of movement, music and emotive expression, *Sandra* positions herself and prioritises the more holistic ballet artist ahead of the idealised ballet body. Protective of her wider artistic talents, she posits that, in ballet, the whole is greater than the sum of the component parts, and vehemently argues that one needs more than technical skills and idyllic body parts. She

challenges the sub-culture's focus on the romanticised ballet body form comprised of idyllic body parts ahead of the *'whole package':*

> *"…So, it does make me* ***very cross*** *when, you know, people think that ballet is just about a body type. And don't get me wrong, Sylvie's [Guillem] body is incredible and in certain pieces as well, especially in neoclassical I would say, like it's just incredible because it's like you're watching a creature. You know and I can see why, you know, 'oh yeah this is the desired perfect leg' or 'this is the arched foot, and this is why it's so beautiful' you can see, it's amazing." (L. 431-436) Sandra (26 F)*

Sandra is caught in the tension between two bodies: one that she perceives as an unrealistic demand for everyone to possess, a narrowly defined idyllic ballet body; and two, her own body that she self-identifies as not possessing of those features. She lives this tension all the time, where the ballet sub-culture explicitly or implicitly points to that balletic body ideal that she cannot achieve regardless of how hard she works. *Sandra* perceives the idealised body in a dualistic form. On the one hand, she perceives it as very positive ('*incredible'*) but on the other she uses an adjective that can normally be interpreted negatively '*a creature'*. Above all, she perceives the idealised body as something not human. In so doing, she highlights her own vulnerability and defends her self-image by vilifying that idealised form.

Tracy had similar issues to *Sandra* with the idealised form. Having decided that she was going to become a ballerina from a very young age, *Tracy* recalls how *she* had chosen to identify with the occupation:

> *"I was 3 when I decided I was going to be a ballet dancer, you know it's been my identity since I was 3, since even before I became one, you know, I had chosen it." (L. 317-318) Tracy (48 F)*

A particular characteristic of *Tracy's* account is that, contrary to other participants, she does not attribute her entrée into ballet based upon any particular skill, artistry, or bodily attributes. Her entire motivation was founded in her choosing to become a dancer suggestive of a strong calling and identification with the craft, something that *Tracy* pursued relentlessly despite many sacrifices throughout her career. Her assertive disposition is emphasised by her repeated use of the first person "*I*", indicating her exercising agency in wanting to pursue this career at all costs.

> *"…so, looking back actually there were some interesting psychological things that went on there; I had always struggled with my weight all the way through my career, since I was 11 I had been told I wasn't the right shape… […] … I'd spent most of my life half starving myself really, or ultimately between, you know, starving and bingeing." (L. 85-90) Tracy (48 F)*

In the context of an aesthetic artform, having identified with the occupation since she was 3, and then being told from age 11 that she '*wasn't the right shape'* for ballet, would have made *Tracy* feel extremely vulnerable. Since her body aesthetic was the constant focus of attention, and the determinant of her being accepted into the craft, she engaged in behaviours that would see her attack her body with bouts of starvation and bingeing as if to punish her body for its role in the challenges that she faced. It is likely that her behaviour was a side-effect of an underlying lack of self-esteem, confidence, and trust coupled with the associated stress surrounding the threat of deselection that could occur at any time. Perhaps the subtext here is that *Tracy* could not control what others thought of her aesthetic, but she could at least attempt to control her own body in an effort to win a truce, a recognition, for talent that she did have and could display, if only her body shape would not let her down.

However, regardless of how *Tracy* had chosen to see herself, ballet management did not see her in the same light. Her desire to make her body aesthetic fit in with the required lines triggered ongoing cycles of '*starving and bingeing'.* Returning to the topic of idyllic ballet body later in the interview, *Tracy* advanced a description:

> *"There's like a cartoon of like a woman in a tutu and pointe shoes and it's got a round head, dark hair, long neck, narrow hips…. long legs, you know, and these things… and of course she looks like a* ***complete alien*** *at the end, but she's got all these things you know…." (L. 1064-1068) Tracy (48 F)*

Tracy's use of this satirical image of a caricature that is '*like a woman'* but not a woman, acknowledges the presence of the mythical idyllic body on the one hand, but simultaneously diminishes its standing, on the other. She refers to the ideal body looking '*like a complete alien',* again alluding to it not being human and experiencing it as something deleterious to her sense of self. '*All these things'* (i.e.: possessing aesthetically ideal body parts) that *Tracy* refers to, do not necessarily result in delivering the complete ballet dancer on their own.

> *"You know I never was…I never did fit the mould physically, you know, I would have liked narrow hips and skinnier legs and bigger insteps… […] …I could jump and I could turn, but it was about things I could do rather than how I looked." (L. 1547-1558) Tracy (48 F)*

A tension battleground unfolds when *Tracy* compares the aesthetic of her object-body with the ideal set by the ballet sub-culture that she hankered after but could not achieve. She was trapped in a body that could perform the technical feats required of her, but against which she had a constant battle to maintain the 'right' balletic lines. As if in defence of herself, she attacks the very body parts, characteristic of the '*alien'* that she sketched earlier. She implicitly challenges the notion that ballet dancers should be

defined solely by their bodily aesthetic. To some extent, *Tracy* is arguing for the same '*package'* that *Sandra* (L. 426) argued for earlier.

However, being endowed with aesthetic and bodily attributes desirable for classical ballet does not always mean that the dancer will want to dance the classics or identify with the occupation. I end this section with *Audrey's* divergent quote:

> *"…other than a few exceptions I **never** really enjoyed dancing the big classics very much, but I was a dancer who physically was **very** suited to the classics, but I much more enjoyed the neo-classic stuff, the new works, all that kind of thing. I think I was secretly a bit of a contemporary dancer but locked in a classical ballet dancer's body. Yes." (L. 415-418) Audrey (39 F)*

Audrey describes a struggle of her two selves. As powerful as her aesthetic appeal was in her gaining access and ascendency in classical ballet, this very same body was equally powerful in denying her access to coveted contemporary dance roles where she could exercise more agency. Just like a metaphorical matryoshka doll, the hidden contemporary dancer that *Audrey* yearned to be was '*locked in'* the classical ballet body that was visible to everyone else. The tension that she experienced between these two selves created a dissonance, suggesting a struggle for her. *Audrey* signalled that classical ballet did not provide her with the freedom to grow and explore other areas for herself. *Audrey's* account is the antithesis of *Sandra* and *Tracy's* experiences. The very notion of society stereotyping *Audrey* as a classical ballerina, solely based on her body aesthetic, left her frustrated and with identity dissonance. It also frustrated her career opportunities.

In summary, this idyllic and unattainable (by most) classical ballet aesthetic, as a tool in the hand of management, serves to motivate and drive ballet dancers. On the one hand, it serves to achieve ever increasing levels of subjective and abstract aesthetic perfection, whilst simultaneously rendering the dancers' identities vulnerable due to the incessant, unattainable, demands.

My analysis reflects that for most of those participants that had bodies conforming closely to the idealised norm, they generally experienced this to be very empowering. However, some that had bodies aligned with the idyllic form found that it limited their choices in terms of dance genre, leaving them trapped. The majority of my participants however did not self-identify as having bodies congruent with the idyllic form and, amongst them, some subscribed to the multifaceted notion of a '*package'* as a better indicator compared with the singular focus of a unidimensional aesthetic determination of suitability for the craft.

Before discussing the intangible attributes that many of my participants made reference to, I first need to address the objectification that my participants applied to their perception of their bodies.

7.3 Mirror, Mirror on the Wall….

In the previous super-ordinate theme, I addressed my participants' experiences of the mystique related to being a classical ballet dancer, how they experienced the influences of the organisation in the process, and how my participants made sense of the socially constructed idealised ballet body.

In this super-ordinate theme, I address how my participants respond to the idealised body. This is comprised of two sub-themes. In '*Body as Tool'* I explore my participants' divergent responses to their lived experiences of how they work on, through, and with their object bodies, in order to shape them and develop the ballet technique. '*The Artist Within'* sub-theme addresses those aspects that are based on the physical body but transcend it into those more intangible elements that complete the holistic ballet dancer. In this sub-theme, I explore the convergences between my participants' accounts in order to identify accords.

7.3.1 Body as a Tool

Quite distinct from the idealised body addressed in the previous super-ordinate theme, in this sub-theme I address how my participants focused on their visible object-body that they worked on, through and with, in an endeavour to close the gap between this body and the idealised ballet aesthetic. Treating their body as a tool that they deploy in their craft, they '*other'* it in a bid to distance themselves from that object-body. This enables them to put that body tool under pressure as if it were not *they* that are being pressured. I explore how my participants deploy and live their bodies and how their treatment ranges from dutiful care through degrees of punishment and even hatred.

When asked what their bodies meant to them, my participants' responses were centred in their task as ballet dancers and tended to be expressed quite graphically as something that they used, like a tool, rather than something that they are. *John* puts it succinctly, having somewhat bashfully chuckled at the question:

> *"[chuckles]…well…it [my body] is my tool, my work tool, so I try to maintain it in the best possible way…I go to the gym, I try to be strong, to look good….**that's very important**…I watch what I eat, not because of weight issues but because I am*

> *focused on eating well like proteins ….[…]…Thought needs to go into this…I **always** take good care of myself…I need to be well…" (L. 314-323) John (36 M)*

In *John's* understanding of his body there is a duality where, on the one hand he perceives his body as an object, 'a work tool', not human. This object body (body tool) is distinct from himself and something that he works with and on, and what he deploys in the execution of his task. This is also the body that he and others see, and that reflects in the mirror. It is this body that he uses to maintain his dancer's identity in society.

On the other hand, *John* distinctly changes focus when he sees his body as being himself, the body *who* he needs to take care of suggesting that he lives two separate bodies simultaneously and has to balance the tension between the two.

Clara similarly draws a distinction between her objective body and herself but, in her case, she unveils tensions encompassing gratitude, guilt, and unkindness towards her body:

> *"I am 100% grateful because it [my body] allows me to do [pause] what I **most love** in the world, and at times I feel a little guilty because… I am not very careful…I do not treat my body that well…. I do not treat it very well [sounding guilty]…naaaah I don't treat it very well to be honest…I don't treat it badly on purpose…For example…[thinking…] I do not think that I am very careful…I do not dedicate a lot of time, I do not focus too much [on my body]…I would rehearse without having done class…I will warm up for 10 minutes and then start to rehearse a complete Swan Lake…I did things that…**really**…**poor body!**…I am very grateful [chuckling]…but yes…yes…now I consider myself that I am more conscious… but even then I am not very…**very**…meticulous with regards to …I don't know…If I did not have a difficult rehearsal…I would not spend 30 mins stretching after it…" (L. 196-204) Clara (31 F)*

Clara's initial expression of gratitude and guilt towards her body gave way to a harshness towards the very instrument that she relies on to do her work. As she ponders her treatment of her body, as if taking it for granted, she escalates the degree of the mistreatment that she describes, perhaps with the motive of trying to tell me just how easy it is for her to dance. It may be that she is expressing just how powerful her body makes her feel.

Aware that she could be coming across as uncaring, she caveated her preamble with ameliorating language before describing how unkind she is to her body. It is almost as if she unintentionally, but somehow deliberately, was frustrating her own long-term career future. It may very well that her behaviour is indicative of a wider issue rather the problem itself. From her wider account she did express that she had interests beyond ballet and it may be that she was signalling an intention to make changes in favour of alternative choices. Nonetheless, throughout the quote, she objectifies her body as '*it'*

and separates herself from her objective body ('…. ***poor body!'***), thus distinguishing between the body that she deploys and *'does not treat very well*', and herself.

In *Tracy*'s case her body's aesthetic stood in the way of her doing what she identified with since she was 3 years' old. As a consequence, *Tracy* put her body through a great deal of difficulty when trying to secure a contract with an elite ballet company:

> *"…the reason the Artistic Director gave me was…was…just how I looked…[…] well,* ***I'll lose weight, I'll do anything you know****…he said 'right well…I'll give you three months'…so I starved myself for 3 months, lost lots of weight, you know, and he went '****lovely, great!,*** *you've got a contract, you know. That was it. And of course, it just produced more problems than it solved, as it always does you know…I had years of sort of constantly trying to starve myself and then putting weight on again…" (L. 1584 -1604) Tracy (48 F)*

From this passage, one can infer the role of the idealised body aesthetic and its influence on the actions of the organisation. This left *Tracy* with little choice but so strong was the young *Tracy's* desire and determination to become a ballet dancer, having invested of herself so much to get to this point, that she would not let her body weight stand in the way. *Tracy* focused on her weight at the expense of everything else, including her wellbeing, but she got her weight down and secured her contract. The organisation and *Tracy* were complicit in the objectification of her body for the purposes of meeting their mutual objectives. The short-term objectives though had long-term consequences for *Tracy*, not only the dancer-*Tracy* but *Tracy* herself.

So harsh was the impact of *Tracy's* non-compliant body on her self-image that she ended up loathing the very instrument that was central to her task, her wellbeing, and herself.

> *"…. I realise now that when I was dancing, I spent* ***way*** *too much time* ***hating my body*** *[she chuckles],* ***really hating*** *everything about it, you know like there wasn't one bit of it that was… right.* ***Not one bit, no****. I had quite good toes for pointe work, eerrh…that's probably as much as I would have conceded [she chuckles]." (L. 1531-1535) Tracy (48 F)*

Feeling powerless, and throwing caution to the wind, *Tracy* turned on her body almost in a revenge mode and starved it as if to punish it for years of non-compliance. Her hatred of her body led her to subject it repeatedly, over time, to bouts of starving and bingeing in a desperate bid to cling on to her occupational identity as a ballet dancer (L. 90-91; and 1604-1605). Now retired from ballet, and with hindsight, she appeared to concede some positive aspects of her body (her toes) that were supportive of her quest to dance. Analogous with the functional strength and artistry *Tracy* embodied, I posit that her toes could be inferred to represent those aspects of the ballet dancer that, unlike the

body aesthetic, are not visible when standing still on stage. *Tracy's* objective body, the body that she and others could see, was something separate from herself but her performing body that delivered the artistry was comprised of more.

My participants tend to '*other'* their bodies as if to turn them into *tools (*object-bodies) through which they work on, through and with to effect their task. With very few exceptions, my participants perceive their bodies not to conform fully to the idealised form. Their response varies from being kind and caring to their bodies, seeing the body out of control and requiring adjustments, to extremes of maltreatment and even hatred. However, these trained bodies form the basis to be able to dance and to develop. The next sub-theme addresses those aspects that extend the body as a tool into the realms of those intangible elements required to complete the holistic ballet dancer.

7.3.2 The Artist Within

In the previous sub-theme, I addressed the object-body that my participants *othered* and treated as a tool. Through training and rehearsal, they developed and shaped the physical body to be able to deliver the ballet technique. For many of my participants though, the complete ballet dancer is comprised of much more. This sub-theme encompasses most of my participants' prioritisation of the holistic ballet artist (i.e. the embodiment of the balletic artform and movement) over the static idealised ballet body aesthetic. It is that aspect of the dancer's interface with society that is based in the physical body, but through emotion, musicality and movement, transcends the boundaries of the body and communicates with society.

I will start with *Tracy*, who succinctly draws a connection between the three key attributes making up the complete ballet dancer:

> *"…Yes, and actually there are many other types of dancer. You know me, I was always the sort of strong, powerful, explosive type, you know… […] …But in terms of…. what you actually are, I think…eerrm…. there's definitely something about a need to express yourself physically. So, there's the enjoyment of pushing yourself physically, which is more the technical aspect… [….] … But then there's the artistic side, so it's about an emotional expression." (L. 1086-1096) Tracy (48 F)*

Tracy argues that the complete ballet dancer is not unidimensionally defined, but instead, is comprised of the three key attributes that converge to make up the holistic ballet dancer (i.e. bodily aesthetic; technical skills; and artistic interpretation). She also points to the tension between these three attributes, highlighting the diversity amongst dancers that make them unique. She was caught between these tensions, and the social

influences of the ballet sub-culture, but it was the artistic side that, for her, carried the day. *Clara* articulates a similar sentiment to *Tracy's* in relation to artistry:

> *"I honestly feel that eemm….part of me, to try to explain it in some way, is artistic or s p i r i t u a l…this is coming from within and is* ***very*** *strong." (L. 98) Clara (31 F)*

Clara's feelings are congruent with those of *Tracy* but she extends the sentiment of emotional expression to identify an aspect of artistry that represents the person's own identity. Artistry is something that she feels she, herself, is contributing to society. *John* shares this sentiment too and extends both *Tracy's* and *Clara's* interpretation of the role of artistry in ballet in more detail:

> *"…to be a ballet dancer, for me, is…is to be the person who studied ballet and has a preparation and can dance …he can dance, has the technique, perhaps he has a [certain] physique…everything that is a ballet dancer. But an artist…[pause] is totally different …because an artist is going to be someone who has all of the above that is necessary to be a ballet dancer but is going to have something extra that…that would draw others' attention to them, even where there are fifty others around them. …When a person really* ***feels*** *what they are doing, delivers a very different type of energy…so…it reaches you…[…]…because* ***an artist*** *is something that* ***comes from within****." (L. 178-185) John (36 M)*

Earlier in his account *John* self-defines as an artist (L. 169). He then takes a third person approach to talk about others that are like him and, by inference, appears to be talking about himself. While there would appear to be some degree of vulnerability in his account he is keen to share his inner feelings about being an artist. Differentiating himself from the uniformity of the corps de ballet, *John* places the emphasis on his individuality and ability to embody the character that he is interpreting on stage. As such, he distinguishes between the developing ability to perform the ballet technique and those, like him, who are able to perform the technique, provide the interpretation, and then also give of themselves '*from within'*, that additional dimension that defines them as an artist. In line with *Tracy's* argument above, *John* infers that it is the '*package'* that is required, and that artistry is the pinnacle ingredient required to be the holistic ballet dancer. While the classical ballet technique is common to all ballet dancers, it is the artistry that makes each individual unique.

While *John* secures his balletic identity by positioning himself as an artist, I discuss *Victor* here because he takes a divergent position and prioritises his aesthetic gift ahead of embodying the balletic artform and movement:

> *"….I have been blessed in life that I am a really good shape, in that I didn't have to actually stay in shape to be a good shape. You could really see it when I started*

dancing….. but standing still I look great. And I'm a really good partner. And so….there's a load of stuff you can do." (L. 1188-1195) Victor (47 M)

Victor's use of the past tense is suggestive of an earlier scenario that has now passed for him. In an effort to preserve his occupational identity, *Victor* focuses on a more familiar and comfortable version of himself where he exclaims that '*standing still I look great'*. Blessed with a naturally '*really good shape'*, *Victor* exults his bodily aesthetic characteristics and partnering skills as if endeavouring to retain his balletic occupational identity. *Victor* appeals to the notion of the idealised body to reinforce his identity and downplays his otherwise waning technique and artistic presence.

In contrast with *Victor's* bodily aesthetic, *David* started out his balletic career having to make up ground to bring his body into shape. *David's* account takes the debate around the relevance of artistry as a factor in the successful development of a ballet career to the next level. Whilst *Tracy* struggled with the idealised ballerina shape but could address it through (unhealthy) interventions, *David's* self-defined bodily attributes railed against the idealised body form to the extent that he was told that he would be a certain failure:

*"…I was far from being a favourite – **in fact**, I was told **categorically** by the Director of the School and my teacher that I would never make it as a dancer…[pause]… particularly a classical dancer – probably because I had short legs, tight hamstrings and crap feet… […]…You know. Eerrm…but again, you know…you react one way or the other. **I was determined.** And I said 'no, well that's your opinion but I want it, I want it badly and I am going to…maybe you don't see that in me' but I recognised that others did and thought, providing I want it badly enough, I am going to go and get it." (L. 346-357) David (40 M)*

Refusing to capitulate and powered by sheer determination emanating from his childhood background where failure was just not an option (L. 43), *David* singles out his less than ideal (for ballet) body parts, objectifying and brandishing them as if they were medals to weaknesses that he had to overcome. These weaknesses to him represent his strength of will. In this tussle between his self-identified physical limitations and his self-belief, he identified performance and interpretation as his voice: it '*was my outlet, …it became almost my identity*" (L. 86-87).

*"…I wasn't that […pause…] gifted, I wasn't gifted with natural technique in terms of turnout, footwork, you know loose…flexibility, all of those things, **but boy I could perform**. I was **very** musical, and I think **I was a very intelligent dancer**." (L. 392-394) David (40 M)*

Yet again *David* distances himself from his 'imperfect' body parts, and contrasts those against less visible musicality and intellect – the more positive attributes of *David,*

the performer. The power of *David's* unwavering determination, and his self-awareness of where his talent lay, were the driving forces that kept him focused on succeeding at all costs becoming '*a principal dancer at 23'* (L.595). Contextualising *David's* sensemaking in terms of his wider account, *David* attributed the influence of being mentored to perform roles that were suited to his talent (L. 595-597) and that enabled him to emphasise and capitalise on his musicality and performability. In so doing, *David* was able to sufficiently neutralise the influence of his physical shortcomings and operationalise his intellect and artistry in pursuit of his cherished occupational identity.

Sandra similarly highlighted the role of intellect in the make-up of the complete ballet dancer, and in the quote below she provides further depth, building up on *David's* account, as to what those intellectual capabilities entail:

> *"….I always had very good turnout and I had a good brain, if that comes into the facility – which I think it should do ...[…]…And of course you need to be well trained, you need to be able to execute things well, which is the kind of sport side of it, the training, but it's about so much more than that. And it's about expression and it's about showing your personality, who you are, being able to act, being able to tell a story, being able to create a mood, to push your body, to work with a partner, it's all of these different things." (L. 418-431) Sandra (26 F)*

Perhaps self-conscious of the gap between the idealised ballet body and her own object-body attributes, and as if to counterbalance her positioning, *Sandra* brings to the fore those intangible emotive dimensions of the individual (e.g. personality; acting; storytelling; mood creation) that she posits are essential in creating the holistic ballet dancer.

While interpretations vary amongst my participants, there is a degree of convergence of opinions that the holistic ballet artist encompasses more than a romanticised ballet aesthetic. They argue that there is a range of intangible intellectual and emotive attributes, in addition to at least some manifestations of a well-proportioned physique that the dancer should develop and exhibit in order to succeed in the occupation. Those participants who identified as having bodies resembling the idealised form also identified with the intellectual and artistic elements but particularly towards the latter parts of their careers. A counter argument was made by *Victor*, where he brings a divergent stance to this sub-theme. In his account, his bodily aesthetic was his strongest attribute at this latter phase of his career and so he tended to give prevalence to his aesthetic over the dynamic and intellectual attributes. Besides *Victor*, the remainder of the participants in this sub-theme all identified aspects relating to their emotive, intellectual, and artistic attributes as the preeminent factors that were instrumental in their developing, becoming and maintaining their professional ballet careers.

7.4 On the Other Side of the Curtain

The third super-ordinate theme is concerned with my participants' experience of their subject-bodies that, unlike their object-bodies, are not reflected in the mirror. These aspects of their being are known only to the individual and constitute their lived experience of their bodies in the occupational context. This super-ordinate theme is comprised of three sub-themes, namely: *'Shades of Passion and Sacrifice'*; '*The Ultimate Betrayal'*; and '*The Final Curtain'*.

'*Shades of Passion and Sacrifice'* is comprised of three aspects that encompass my participants' more salient experiences. The positive and desirable outcomes of their calling are juxtaposed to the dark side, the second aspect, where overzealous passion leads to paradoxical behaviours leaving dancers vulnerable and exposed. The third aspect of this sub-theme illuminates some of the more salient sacrifices made by my participants in the pursuit of a professional ballet career. '*The Ultimate Betrayal'* sub-theme addresses how my active participants in their 30s and early 40s experience youthful ageing in the occupation. I conclude this super-ordinate theme with '*The Final Curtain'*, a sub-theme where I address my participants' lived experience of age and ageing prior to and during the transitioning process. I include accounts from my late career active dancers as well as reflections from career-transitioned participants.

7.4.1 Shades of Passion and Sacrifice

Articulated as a significant driving force for their passion, love for ballet was expressed and described by some of my participants as a tender all-encompassing presence, or as a tangible object of desire by others. More broadly, all of my participants spoke in one way or another of their passion for ballet. All but two of my participants felt positively passionate about ballet as an occupation. These two divergent participants were either ambivalent to the craft or had grown to dislike *what it was like* to be a ballet dancer. Within that group of participants that were positively passionate about the artform, there were shades of passion that existed within a continuum that ranged between desire and obsession. In this sub-theme, I analyse and juxtapose my participants' quotes that portray these varying shades of passion. In many cases, my participants' accounts reflect lived experience aspects from both sides of the continuum. Across all of the accounts that I analyse in this sub-theme there is an underlying thread of sacrifice that is made by my participants to pursue the craft.

I introduce this sub-theme with a quote from *Beatrice* that reflects key features of her passionate engagement with the artform:

"….I don't feel like there is anything else [besides ballet]. But I don't know....well obviously I can't say there'll never be anything else, but it's always been there. So, I'm just....yeah, [ballet] it's a bit of an obsession. It's like …..it's a way of life, it's like a religion...[…]… Yeah, you can't do things half-heartedly, yeah" (L. 1632-1645) Beatrice (18 F)

Her initial careful language gives way to a more intense response that unveils a powerful relationship with ballet. *Beatrice* turns to metaphors that capture the degree of engagement that she has with the artform. Describing that relationship as a '*way of life*' or '*like a religion'* points to the degree of dedication that could lead to obsession. In so doing, she also highlights a tension between dancing and living, inferring that one activity interferes with the other and that a career in ballet could not accommodate both. This is suggestive that *Beatrice* is willing to sacrifice other interests to fully engage with ballet. However, when an injury put her ballet future at risk (L. 850), she went as far as to turn down a job with her preferred company so as not to compromise her long-term ballet career prospects:

*"They weren't too happy about [it]….because they are not used to being turned down, because no-one else would do it. There are **so** many people dancing with injuries like that…" (L. 855-857) Beatrice (18 F).*

Beatrice recalls how in her final year at vocational ballet school, where contracts are on offer, she and others were given the opportunity to dance with the elite company associated with the school. An ankle injury was the trigger that led *Beatrice* to have to make a choice between dancing with the injury or walking away from this opportunity. She chose to assert herself and placed her ankle injury recovery, and long-term career prospects, ahead of the ballet company's convenience, even if that ruffled a few feathers.

What emboldened *Beatrice* was having been offered a contract at another elite ballet company which she was considering as an alternative to the company in question (L. 843). Highlighting that hers was a departure from the approach that many injured dancers follow, *Beatrice* acknowledged '*feeling slightly guilty'* presumably because her absence meant that colleagues had extra work covering the spot she would have danced, rather than feeling guilty letting ballet management down. *Beatrice* usurped the power from management in an environment where such practices are very uncommon. She balanced her feelings of guilt against what '*she knew that was best* [for her]*'* (L.1088). In the process, she laid bare the imbalance between the level of power and authority exercised by the ballet company and the extent of vulnerability normally experienced by dancers, and the corresponding fragility of their careers.

Placing her hand on her heart as she conveys her passion for the artform, *Fiona* communicates its powerful influence and the special place it occupies in her life:

*"I **love** ballet and I **love** performing, and **I just love it so much**. Because there's this feeling I get like right here [placing her hand on her heart], and it's **the passion**, like I can't explain it. And I **love** the music. And I just like....I don't know, **I just love it so much**… […]…Yeah. But like moments in the music, like today…the pianist played something beautiful and I was like 'gosh I just love this'…(L. 875-877) Fiona (21 F)*

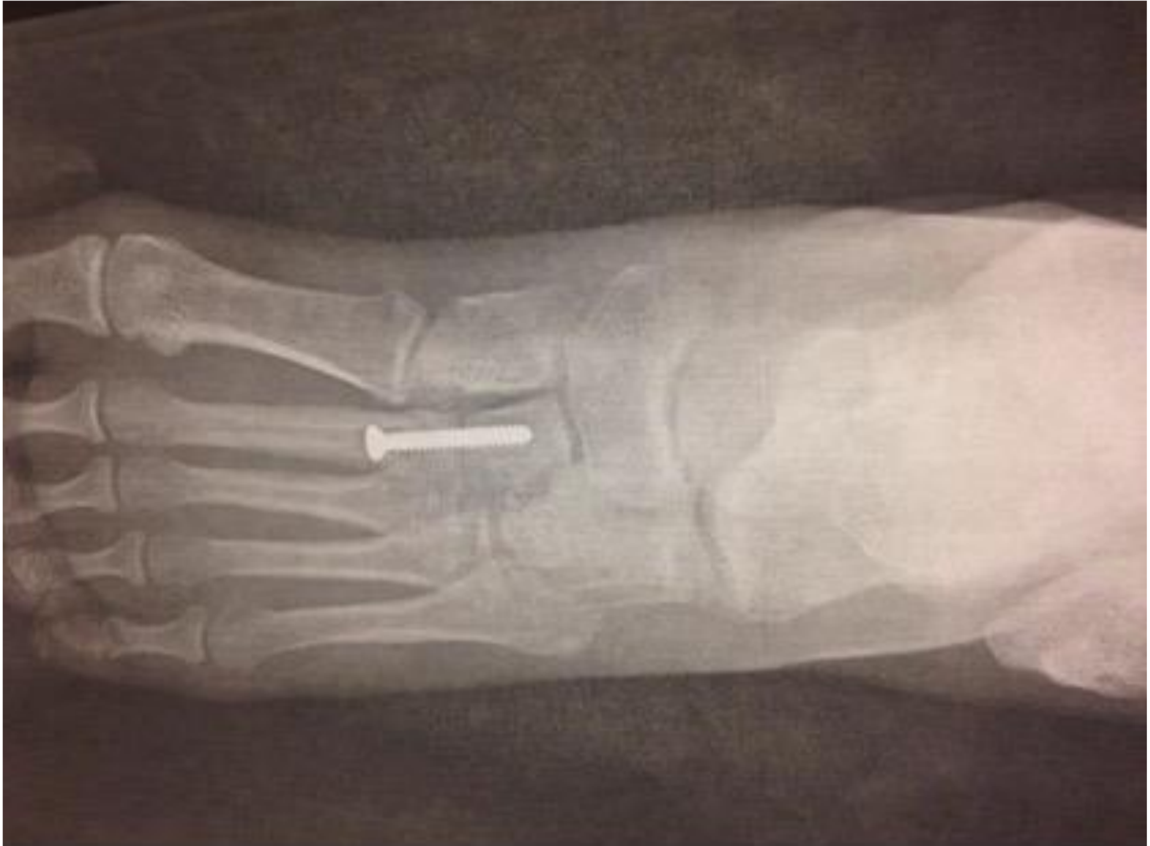
It felt as if ballet had taken over her whole existence. *Fiona* professes her '*love'* for the craft and performing. A passion that she underscores six times in this short quote as if to confirm to me, and affirm to herself, how much she loves it. She relates her love to the activities involved in ballet and engaging with them but cannot fully explain the warm emotive sensation that she feels in her heart. Nonetheless, that feeling drives her to engage deeply with her performance when she hears the music as if transformed by its magic and beauty.

However, *Fiona's* extent of passion and dedication would have predicted her willingness to ignore an injury and continue to rehearse unabated until pain spoke out loud enough not to be ignored:

*"…So, I danced on a stress fracture for 2 months like that I knew of, and without pain, and then it started hurting **horrendously badly**, like the **most** painful.... **second most painful thing I've ever had happen**. But I kept dancing because we were starting Nutcracker, and it was Flowers, and it was Balanchine… and I knew it and **I had my old spot**." (L.581-584) Fiona (21 F)*

There is a striking 'everyday normality' tone in *Fiona's* voice when she starts talking about her foot's stress fracture. This contrasts with the repetitive, and escalating intensity of her tone and language, when her foot starts to hurt her '*horrendously badly'* as if imploring not to be ignored by her. Her foot injury becomes objectified (*'it'*) as if it was something separate that she wanted to distance from herself. However, in a desperate bid to retain her '*old spot'* in the ballet, and trying to drown out the pain, *Fiona* elected to continue to dance rather than seek treatment. Getting treatment would mean time away from rehearsing and that constituted a risk of losing her place in the performance that she was not willing to entertain. Unlike *Beatrice*, who prioritised her medium-long term dancing future by allowing an injury to heal, *Fiona* risked all in a bid not to miss out on her place. *Fiona's* unwavering desire to dance her coveted role came to an abrupt end when the stress fracture in her foot developed into a full-on bone break requiring surgical and mechanical reconstruction (see photo below).

Figure 4 - Fiona's Injury X-Ray

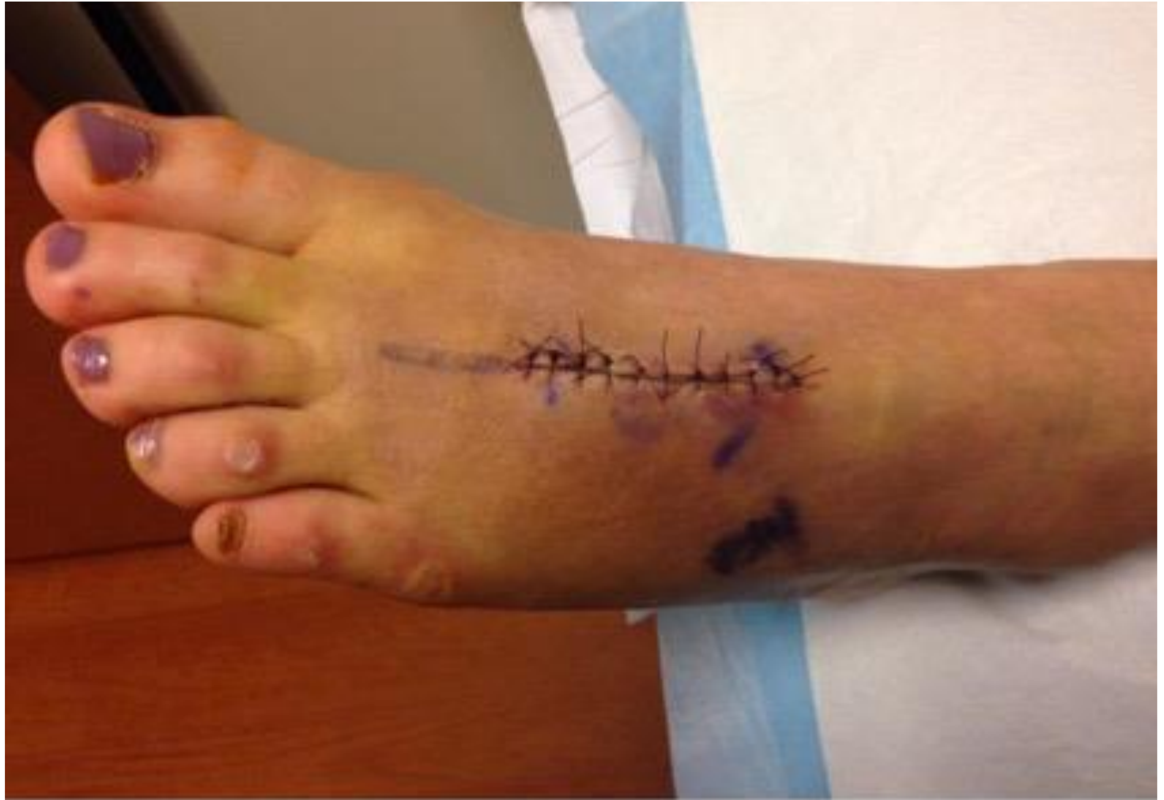


Fiona brought in several photos to the interview for discussion, of which most were related to her foot injury, and the protracted recovery process. These photos, she explained, were important to her because, during that time, she was '***so scared, so scared'*** (L. 685). The combination of viewing the photos whilst *Fiona* was talking about her injury was very powerful for me as a researcher. It was as if a bridge was linking her explanation of the experience with my observation of the images of her experience. It enriched my understanding of her understanding of the experience. At this point, *Fiona* explained that she was afraid that her foot would not heal properly and that she would never be able to dance again. To *Fiona*, ballet meant a *heartfelt passion* (L. 876), a safe haven in the middle of an emotional storm that she wanted to cling on to because it represented who she was. She spoke of her fear of dying '*on the operating table'* (L. 761-763). That fear – accentuated by repetition in the passage and framed by her sombre tone – seemed to metaphorically go beyond the notion of physical death. It seemed to imply that she saw herself being permanently separated from her ballet environment, with the unlikelihood of ever returning to it. To her, this would represent an experience akin to death and terrified her.

Looking at this photo, it not only shows the stitches and the scar relating to the broken foot bone, but it also depicts the blisters, corns, and bruising that is indicative of

the everyday wear and tear and minor injuries that *Fiona* was incurring to remain active as a dancer. It serves as a powerful symbol depicting *Fiona's* degree of commitment to her job.

Figure 5 - Fiona's Injured Foot After Surgery



Despite her strong commitment to the artform, a week before her operation, *Fiona* received a call from the Artistic Director telling her that *she was "money walking out the door"* and that they were *"going to have to let [her] go".* This left *Fiona* feeling "*depressed and heartbroken, just like lost*" and how "*nothing can make you happy when you are going through something like that, like it just didn't… all I wanted was ballet*" (L. 728-750). Losing her job, where ballet to *Fiona* represented her entire being, left her with no safe haven to cling on to ('*just like lost*') – like a castaway on the ocean of life.

However, *Fiona's* passion for ballet knew no bounds:

> *"…that day, I don't think anything will ever compare to that feeling. Because like in that moment, like…no matter what happened, I was like….'Oh, this has all been worth it!' (L. 1325-1327).*

Discussing how she felt and what it meant to her when she was offered a new contract at a different ballet company, some two years later, *Fiona*'s occupational identity has been salvaged. It was as if all the pieces of her life have been put back together again, satisfying her overpowering need to dance again.

John's account is anomalous. On the one hand he goes to great lengths taking good care of his body. On the other hand, in the middle of a demanding rehearsal session with a choreographer, *John* heard a tear-sounding noise coming from his arm but he did not stop, he silenced the pain and carried on:

> *"… the choreographer was trying to do things... she wanted to try that the girl jumped like a plane and landed on one of my arms...and it worked well a million times…but the choreographer asked us to repeat it* ***SO, SO,*** *many times that my arm could no longer stand it…So, she [the dancer] threw herself and then we heard* ***gggrrrrrrr****…..[a tear or ripping sounding noise coming from his arm] and, because I am tough and can withstand quite a bit of pain…I've said '****carry on…carry on****….****throw yourself again'*** *but soon after that I felt* **very** *unwell." (L. 240-245) John (36 M)*

This quote captures the unequal power relationship between dancers and choreographers where *John* unquestioningly responded to the choreographer's requirements. In addition, as if wanting to prove his endurance and that he was worthy of her choice, *John* insisted on rehearsing the partnered jump once again despite having heard the ripping noise in his arm. Seeing it as pushing the boundaries of his body, *John* pushes on, overriding its messaging of tiredness and pain. This could also imply a degree of complicity with the choreographer in pursuit of high performance.

Where *John* and *Fiona's* accounts converge is that they both silenced the body messaging in favour of the prize of proving their worth and retaining their spots. Like *Fiona, John* continued rehearsing with his arm seeming still functional but injured.

> *"Then the choreographer said 'lets' take 5 minutes' so I sat down…but when I attempted to stand up again…I could not lift my arm…. I realised that something odd had happened…and I realised that quite a bit had gone wrong…the bicep did not get torn, but all of the ligaments around the shoulder joint and the joint itself got pulled and dislodged...I could not do anything with that arm…nothing at all…" (L. 246-250) John (36 M),*

Eventually the body, through pain and immobility, made itself heard in no uncertain terms. This brought *John's* injured arm and its plight patently into his consciousness. The irony is that whilst his arm was functional and *John* was fully reliant on that functionality to be able to dance, he did not give it much attention. Now with an immobile arm and in pain, the very same arm commanded his full focus. It not only prevented from dancing, but he had to undergo surgery and rehabilitation for nearly a year afterwards. *John* reflected on his relationship with ballet during this time:

"I [pause] am going to be a dancer ***always****. What I* ***love****….what I* ***see****…* ***will always stay****…. whether I can do it or not…It's always going to be with me" (L. 278-279) John (36 M)*

Injury and rehabilitation for *John* did not fracture his identification with the occupation. Ballet is such an overwhelming calling for him and has become so intertwined with his identity to the point that he does not see himself independent of the ballet world. Like *Fiona*, earlier, *John's* identification with ballet remained undeterred despite the injury. At this point for *John* his occupational identity is at a crossroads, his passion seems to have shifted from desire to obsession.

Beatrice, Fiona, and John all identified passionately with their balletic occupational identity but *Fiona* and *John* could not prevent their passion driving their behaviour to the point that they overrode their bodies' warning signs and incurred serious injuries. By contrast, *Beatrice* heeded her body's warning signs and avoided serious injury. *David* too had injuries along the way but like *Beatrice,* he maintained a harmonious passion for the craft and heeded his body's messaging:

"…I mean I learned my craft ***very*** *quickly and very disciplined, and it was* ***wonderful****, I mean it was absolutely brilliant, I got so much stage time, I really learned my craft, it was a* ***fabulous*** *career. But then there comes a point where the reality of the career mortality comes to the front". (L.619-622) David (40 M)*

In this quote, as if to prepare for the inevitable separation from his dancer identity, *David* endeavours to distance himself from his dancing career. He reflects on his experiences during his career with a degree of pride and nostalgia. Such is his sense of the impending finality that he engages with the grieving process in anticipation of the eventual death of his dancing career and its concomitant impact upon his occupational identity.

Thus far, when considering passion, all of the participants discussed incurred sacrifice but continued, one way or another, in the craft until (where applicable) they chose to do depart the occupation. *Tracy* is a participant that is salient in the discussion of passion owing to the extreme nature of her experiences. With the advent of being offered the opportunity to dance the cherished role of Juliet meant that she finally had to address the long-standing Achilles tendon injury that she had been harbouring for a long time. She was sure that her injured Achilles "*was going to rupture any minute"* but she kept dancing on it and was "*sort of limping after every show*" (L. 47-49):

*"…I was…[pause]…****desperate,*** *because I thought if I just take some time off and I come back and it's not better, then I won't be able to dance Juliet – and* ***I'll do***

> ***anything to do this part**, like I don't care, **I'll lose a leg**!...and so I had the operation and I think that was a mistake. But I got on, and I did Juliet...' (L. 62-66) Tracy (48 F)*

Reasoning that she may never dance this role if she missed this prized opportunity, *Tracy* opted for having the operation in a desperate attempt to ensure that she could dance her cherished role. Her willingness to '*lose a leg'* to perform this role speaks to how much her passion to dance drives her, and how much she was prepared to trade-off and sacrifice to achieve her goal. Ironically, by '*losing a leg*', *Tracy* would be forever unable to dance the role but such is her dedication and drive that she '*does not care'* if she has to pay the ultimate price. However, from her actions, she does care and she cares passionately. She went to extreme lengths to ensure that she could dance and rise to the expectations of the organisation. No amount of sacrifice was too much to bear until her dancing career was no more. Circumstances prevailing at the time meant that *Tracy* could not take to the stage for her final bow:

> *"And that's been the hardest thing… actually all I wanted was to get back on stage and finish properly and go 'this is my last show, this is my saying goodbye to my…you know… stage career'. And so, it feels like I've sort of been left hanging, I never had any closure." (L. 305-308) Tracy (48 F)*

Tracy was now left with an unresolved sense of deep loss of both occupational and self-identity. To convey her sense of despair and lack of control she uses a potent symbolic image ('*I've been sort of left hanging*'). The painful rawness of the neglect that she still feels about it, having self-identified from the age of 3 with the occupation, well before she became a dancer, remains unabated.

> *And there are times when I think it sounds a bit…you know it's 'just dancing' and…but I realise the language is the same as people who have lost loved ones and never get to bury them, you know, they don't have closure. And people need closure for things that are that vital to them, that are that…and that's when you realise how much part of your life it is." (L. 308-313) Tracy (48 F)*

Tracy draws a comparison between the meaning of ballet to others ('*just dancing'),* and what it meant to her (a '*vital part*'). In the process, emotionally, *Tracy* equates her loss of occupational identity to the death of a loved one, as if she was talking about the death of her dancing-self that she could never mourn. The lack of closure that she experiences means that she perceives her dancing-self still to be present ('*how much part of your life <u>it is</u>*'). As if to deflect her degree of vulnerability, she aligns herself with others in wanting closure. It is as if her dancing-self constantly reminds her of her cherished past and the pain of having been denied the opportunity to go through the usual ceremony of goodbyes and departure – a typical process of mourning. This denial

does not allow her to move on and remains unresolved. She is left feeling unsung, neglected, and discarded by her ballet community.

Thus far, what was convergent for *Beatrice, Fiona, John, David and Tracy* was their strongly-held passion for the artform. *Audrey* and *Victor*, however, did not share this same degree of passion. I address *Audrey* first who had an ongoing ambivalent relationship with the occupation:

> *"…classical ballet is very, very narrow, you've sort of have this fantasy ideal… particularly women… the sort of feminine ideal which I always struggled with…[…]….it's not that it's a bad thing but its' like a very small slice of the pie, of what a woman is you know, and it's **not** what I feel as a woman….[..]…that's not what I want to be, and I am not particularly interested in that woman, you know…" (L. 688-698) Audrey (39 F)*

In this quote, *Audrey* recognised, acknowledged, and challenged the fantasy ideal of the ballerina. Using a metaphor, she sought to objectify and diminish the notion of the narrow interpretation of the ideal balletic female form and to distance herself from it, something she sought to reinforce. To *Audrey*, society was defining who she should be. The tension that she lived on a day-to-day basis, not identifying with being a classical ballet dancer yet possessing the ideal balletic form and having to constantly perform the role, developed into an existential dissonance for her. This unresolved tension ultimately drove her to depart the occupation.

Victor faced a similar identity dissonance with ballet where he too became defined by society for what he did, rather than who he was:

> *"I had become defined by my position and that random thing where you go….at sort of 17-18 you're… you become known as 'the hot thing' **which means nothing** but it's that thing where you're doing articles in [glossy magazine], you're on the cover of magazines, you're….yeah you're in this, you pick up a glossy magazine and you're…there's a 4-page spread that are pictures of you. **So obviously… that's you**. How do you then go 'I don't really want to do it', because you've … essentially you've become successful, you're at the… the peak, everything's **open** to you… **apart from yourself**. And you kind of go 'f*****ing hell'**….**OK'**" (L. 261-272) Victor (47 M)*

Victor uses a metaphor ('*the hot thing'*) to epitomise the status and value ascribed to him by society based upon what he does. To *Victor* this has no value. Quite the opposite, he appears to be crying out for recognition as a person, *who he is*, rather than being recognised for *what he does*. He feels trapped by society's positioning and he is left with no option but to comply. *Victor* is faced by a tension between responding to society's demands and having to suppress his own self-perception. In so doing, the dilemma for

him is that he will be denying who he really is. Being denied self-recognition as an individual had implications for his occupational identity and career:

> *"So, I think I am a bit of an anomaly, I don't know anybody else within [elite ballet company] who is a bit kind of going 'I **massively** regret my career with [elite ballet company] [chuckling]…you know, that's a bit of an odd…a bit of an oddity." (L. 508-509) Victor (47 M)*

Victor separates himself from his peers in the elite ballet company as if to emphasise his individuality. Then, as if to tear at the organisational chains of constraint and in an audacious display of defiance against them, he reiterates his independent spirit and stresses his regret for his career with the elite ballet company. His torment at being confined to a corporate mould that defined his being ("*classical dance is very little to do with personal choice"* (L. 521)) led him to an emotional outburst. He had been deprived of his individuality.

This sub-theme illustrated the most salient quotes amongst my participants' accounts where the continuum, from harmonious through degrees of obsessive passion, for the artform can be observed. A degree of passion is present in all of their accounts but the nature of the passion has not necessarily been the determinant for their success – they all succeeded in becoming professional ballet dancers. The nature of the passion (e.g. harmonious, obsessive, or divergent) did have a bearing on their occupational identity.

7.4.1.1 Sacrifice – Anything but the Body

In this sub-section I address the sacrifices that my participants endured as a result of their passion for the artform. My participants shared a number of different types of personal sacrifices that they have made at different times of their lives to become and remain professional ballet dancers. I focused specifically on those sacrifices that my participants identified and found two broad themes that comprised the most salient impact upon them: the subjugation of their individuality; and the tensions arising from a re-definition of the self through transformative life changing events.

Reflecting on joining boarding full-time vocational ballet school, *David* recounts his first weeks at the institution and how his identity was re-shaped to '*see fit for the institution'*:

> *"… you know, we weren't allowed – this is age 11, you know… you are away from home for the first time – we weren't allowed to go home for at least the first 3 weeks so that you had that bedding-in period. And I think what it was, was to ship-shape, get you in line. Break you down, build you back up and break…you know, your identity and the way they see fit for… [silence]… the institution. So yeah, and it was*

very odd how your individuality did…your individuality…that you had before and your personality that you had before coming to the school was very much diluted after a while and you…yeah, you became a very similar bunch. And, yeah, it got to the point where even our accents became very similar." (L. 221-237) David (40 M)

Isolated and cut-off from the external world and anything familiar to him, *David* recounts how he underwent a systematic process of depersonalisation, tearing down any individuality he had. On the journey, *David* surrendered, to some extent, his individual self to the discipline and control of the '*institution'* in a trade-off to adopt the uniform collective balletic identity. The palpable silence *David* makes before uttering the words '*the institution'* is notable, meaningful, as if so many years after graduating from the school, he was still under their influence. He also repeats the word '*individuality'* a couple of times in a very short space, as if stressing the importance of something very valuable for him that he had to give up. In their collective defence the student cohort were bound together as if to rebuff the onslaught from the organisation. In the process, the organisation's objectives were achieved and they adopted patterns that resulted in the tension being lowered.

David provides an insight into his way of coping with his two selves: the institutionally-shaped one, and his individual self:

*"…but deep down I am still just the kid from [English city], I **always have been,** and I will **always** hang on to that. […] It makes me feel **genuine**, like a **human being**, you know a **normal human** being with **no pretence**…." (L. 652-653; L. 661-662) David (40 M)*

To *David*, his institutionally shaped identity is something akin to an act that he needed to perform in order to fit in and thrive within the ballet sub-culture. In a bid to defend his self-identity though, *David* does not fully surrender his individual self to the institution ('*…I am still just the kid from [English city]')*. Whilst he gains recognition and enjoyment from his occupational-self, *David* emotionally articulates that it is his roots that ground him and with which he identifies most strongly.

Maria spoke of two worlds colliding when she discussed how her upbringing and initial dance training, associated with significant freedoms, '*clashed'* with the structured, hierarchical ways of her first elite ballet company:

"…I came from, you know, running in the fields… and that [elite ballet company] was a proper institution and clashed with me. I think, it's just taken me a long time to…to come to terms with this sort of big boat when you've been running around naked in an island kind of thing, do you know what mean? And just going to cruise. I couldn't think anything with less freedom of such things. But yet, you know, they're full of knowledge and you know, once I embraced it, the whole thing....and I mean

inevitably you know, again I've got my roots and my [mother tongue], you know, nationality and whatever, but actually wherever I am, I'm trying to accommodate and try to melt with everybody, and melt with the culture, and melt with…[…]… and the only way is just to melt with the crowd, you know..". (L. 233-246) Maria (42 F)

Maria couches her thoughts in powerful visual metaphors. She imagines '*running in the fields'* and '*running around naked in an island'* to depict her strong sense of freedom and unstructured life that she enjoyed until her teenage years (L. 84), and to convey a sense of the magnitude of the change for her becoming a professional ballet dancer. These metaphors also provide a strong contrast with the captive nature of the rigour and discipline of the hierarchical structures of the organisation ('*big boat') and the loss of individual agency* ('*just going to cruise'*). As if to rationalise the trade-off, *Maria* acknowledges the value to her of being part of the institution ('*full of knowledge'*) and resigns herself that, in order to be fully accepted by the sub-culture. The sacrifice that she made was to subjugate her individuality and '*melt'* or dissolve as if to disappear in the crowd. *Maria* clings on to her '*roots'*, using another metaphor signifying a deep but hidden sense of belonging at home ('*my mother tongue, you know, nationality and whatever'*) living the profound importance of her self-identity in private.

David and *Maria* both had to suppress their respective individualities in an effort to fit in with what they perceived as required by their respective institutions. Where they differ is that *David* underwent this process as a child, whilst isolated in a boarding school and away from any external support and influences. *Maria*, on the other hand, embraced the change as a young adult. Whilst both had challenges of their own adapting, *David* had to adapt at a very young age whilst *Maria* had the added challenge of coming to terms with the requirements at a much later stage in her development. Through all of their experiences, the commonality was that they both clung on to their root identities conveying just how important these are to them, guarding their self-identities, unwilling to surrender that deep-seated last remaining bit that is available only to themselves.

Transformational life events, such as motherhood, threatens the ballerina imagery, body, and self-identity, triggering a redefinition of the self. In the next couple of accounts *Audrey* and *Patricia* bring into focus how they juggled their occupational and motherhood identities.

Audrey spoke of her feeling "*very powerful, sort of quite powerful, invincible*" (L. 482-483) when she had her baby, a transformative life-changing encounter, but something that she did not feel after returning to work. Caught in a quandary of redefining her sense of self, in other words: between being a mother wanting to spend longer with her baby, and her need to get back to work to avoid being stripped of all of her previous ballerina roles that she performed, she felt damned if she did and damned if she did not

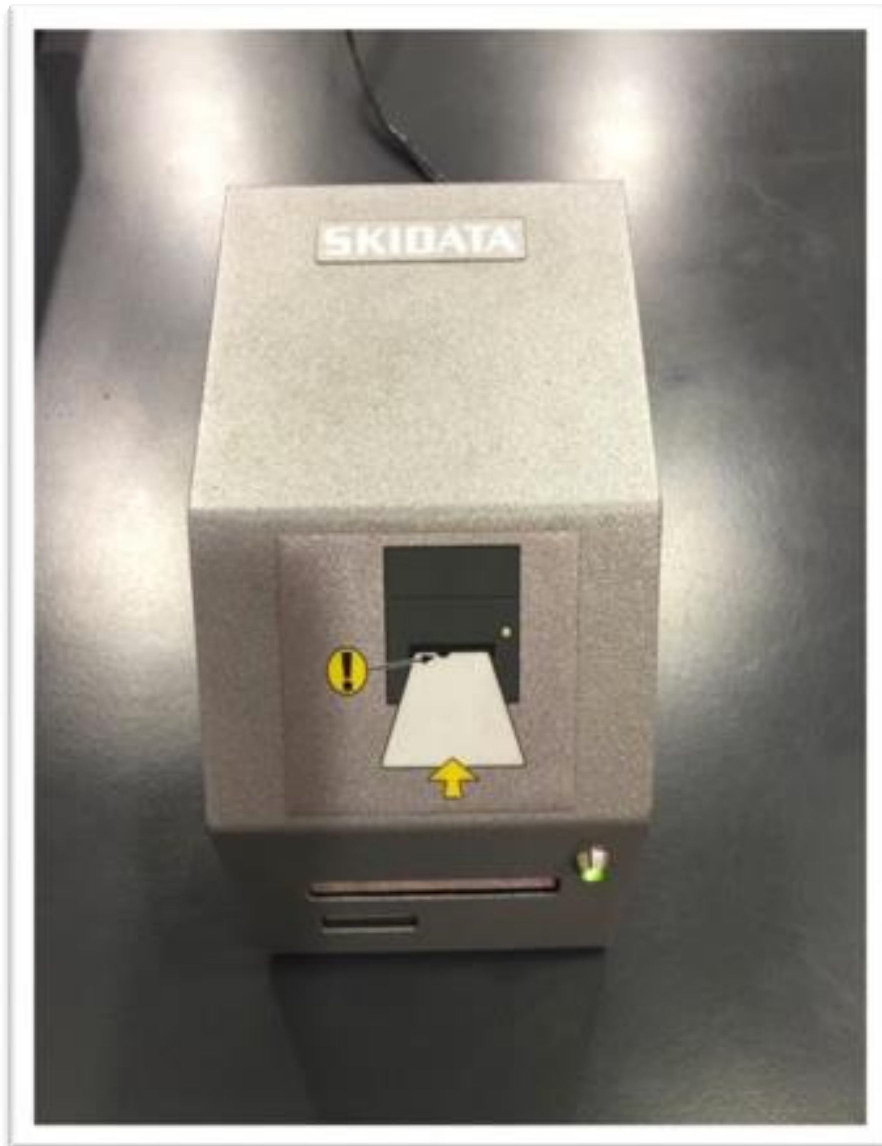
get back to work soonest. *Audrey* decided to return to work "*really much too early*" (L. 490). That decision had significant consequences for her emotional wellbeing:

> *"…. I just remember feeling my first, particularly those first days that I left my son at home and went back to work just for a couple of hours, I felt like I was* ***hacking off all my limbs*** *when I went, it was a really, really strong feeling of loss you know, and like a physical loss, leaving the house and leaving my baby at home. So, it was* ***really*** *difficult." (L. 534-538) Audrey (39 F)*

Audrey vividly frames her inner agony when she describes leaving her baby behind. Couched in very graphic embodied language, her yearning to remain with her baby left her with a feeling of *having all of her limbs being hacked off*, immobilising her. Consequently, she found focusing on her work '*really, really hard'* particularly her feeling of enduring physical loss, as if her baby was still part of her. She tentatively returned and planned to *"sort of stay…so [she] sort of did like a season"* (L. 542-543) but juggling her priorities became a tug of war for her. For *Audrey*, the sacrifice of not being with her baby was so overwhelmingly powerful that foregoing her career became a lesser sacrifice.

Patricia was keen to discuss her experiences of combining a ballet career in an elite touring company with motherhood. As we started to discuss these combined experiences, she presented a photo that she had brought to the interview. The image really puzzled me at first. This grey rectangular contraption turned out to be a car park ticket machine. *Patricia* explained that the ticket machine is located at the exit of a garage very close to her ballet company's headquarters. She parks there regularly when the company is in [base town]. I asked *Patricia* what the image meant to her:

Figure 6 - Patricia's Parking Ticket Machine



"[smiling]… I [get up at 06:30hrs] come in at 09:30hrs to get ready for class at 10:30hrs, then we do a matinee or rehearsals... and then the evening show...and then I get home at about 23:00hrs-23:15hrs...and then the same…the following morning.... which is...very tiring. […] …When I see the car park machine on my way out it means that is the end of my day... and ***I am at my happiest****...* ***I am going home to my girls****!!" (L. 1466-1468) Patricia (35 F)*

This inanimate, grey, angular object captured as a flat-surface photograph acted as the trigger, and an outlet, for *Patricia* to elaborate on her invisible yet textured emotions of juggling a ballet career in an elite touring ballet company with motherhood. Speaking with pride, she offered a glimpse of her daily schedule whilst at the company's hometown, yet it is the contrasting warm feelings that the image conjures up for *Patricia*

that acts as the prompt – it helps to convey the emotional load that *Patricia* is living. Suddenly, as if in a double-take, *Patricia's* less tangible struggle turns into something more palpable and more clearly visible.

While the following two quotes precede the quote above in the chronology of *Patricia's* account, the inclusion of the image and the associated text, and its revelatory meaning to her in the conversation, was so powerful at providing deeper insights into her sensemaking of the passages below. It also afforded me greater opportunities to make sense of her sensemaking, thus rendering the whole greater than the sum of the parts in my analysis.

> *"[…] … you know that there are people in the lower ranks striving and you see that…so even if you are happy, which I am **very** happy you know, soloist is more than what I ever thought would happen…eerrrm…. but there still these other people at the same rank as me that I know aren't happy there. They want to be higher…. you know…. you know…[…]… it would not be [possible] working motherhood and a ballet career at the same time…" (L. 547-556) Patricia (35 F)*

Patricia conveys a strong sense of resignation as if trying to appease her dancer-self ambition ('*soloist is more than I ever thought would happen*') whilst comparing herself with striving peers and lower-ranking colleagues ('*they want to be higher…you know*'). The need to strongly justify her contentment with her current ranking seems to infer a degree of unease at not wanting to strive in the occupation. On the one hand, her dancer-self is ambitious and would like to strive but her motherhood-self has other priorities. The inclusion of the inanimate, grey, angular object captured as a flat-surface image, the parking meter photo, served to reveal more vividly *Patricia's* reaction to it and in so doing she eloquently unveiled how her dancer-self and motherhood-self competed with each other. It shed greater light on her inner turmoil. In the process, *Patricia* acknowledges her sacrifice, trying to balance both identities intimating that striving to be further up in her career would be incompatible with working motherhood and thus revealing an experience of a simultaneous double sacrifice: both her ballet career and motherhood.

As if to lay bare the cruelty inherent in the occupation, *Patricia* brings into focus the degree of sacrifice that she has made relative to the ephemeral nature of the ballet career:

> *"…. the thought of having to stop in a few years' time…. just…..kills me…."(L. 259-260) Patricia (35 F)*

Patricia powerfully conveys her feelings about future career transitioning prospects. Likening it to a death, the impending conclusion of her career is something so dreadful that it leaves her with a profound sense of pending loss. This brings into

focus just how meaningful being a ballet dancer is to her. This infers that there is a third sacrifice on the horizon for *Patricia*. The first was her partial sacrifice of her ballet career to motherhood. The second is her partial sacrifice of motherhood to her continuing ballet career. The third impending sacrifice is her eventual career transitioning and its concomitant loss for her occupational identity and community.

7.4.2 The Ultimate Betrayal

After many years of training their bodies to hone ballet technique, my more seasoned participants experienced the inevitable physical decline in the very instrument they needed for their craft. They all resorted to an array of interventions in an effort to stave off the effects of ageing, wear and tear, and its impact on their performance.

Ageing, in an occupation where the body has such a pivotal role, was a very sensitive topic to address. This sub-theme is arranged in two parts: '*Ageing - The Reluctance Pas de Deux'*, which reveals just how sensitive an issue it was for my seasoned active participants to engage with the idea of youthful ageing in the occupation. The second part, '*The Final Curtain'* addressed how my participants experienced that gradual decline and the ultimate betrayal by their bodies at a time when their artistry was still in the ascendancy. The commonality for my participants was the deployment of additional individualised interventions to sustain their careers but these were nuanced by the chronological age at which those additional interventions were required. Divergence from the norm were those that were able to remain active well into their 40s.

7.4.2.1 Ageing – The Reluctance Pas de Deux

Discussing pain and injury came almost naturally to my participants. Ageing, probably second only to weight, was the topic that during the interviews I felt elicited a more emotive response from my more seasoned participants. However, approaching the age topic felt to me more like I was trying to get blood out of a stone. I, therefore, had to find alternative ways of sensitively weaving the notion of ageing into the questions that could enable me to explore the topic.

Whilst discussing how *John* looked after himself (his exercise routines and body maintenance), his sensitivity with the issue of age and the dialogue that we engaged in, felt somewhat like two children innocently playing 'hide and seek' but in our case, both knowing what was at stake. It is the dance in the dialogue, the pas de deux, that we engaged in during the interview, that reveals the depth of emotion that this topic holds for him. With trepidation, I proceeded to engage in an exchange with *John* to build on

the nugget that he offered when he volunteered his actual age. I focused on his [dis]comfort around age by discussing how his body felt. With equal trepidation *John* responded, initially in single syllables, followed by a more relaxed and open dialogue.

> *"Q: …and talking about looking after yourself at 36 …How does your body feel?*
>
> *A: …it shows….[he says in a lowered tone, smiling in a knowing way]*
>
> *Q: Does it show…?*
>
> *A: Yes…it shows…*
>
> *Q: How does it show?*
>
> *A: **I note it**! [he responded with a surrendering smile]*
>
> *Q: but….h o w…?*
>
> *A: …..People say that it does not show…but **I see it**. I see it because… your back is stiffer, the stamina is wavering…everything takes more effort, so one has to go to the gym to maintain everything in good shape, and it helps me to feel better. Previously, when I was a principal at 18…I never went to the gym…I did nothing…and I had heaps of energy, my body felt a lot more flexible…and because my body was a lot more flexible then, I didn't have these tight, stiff muscles….I don't' know…**everything was a lot easier**! (L.324-335) John (36 M)*

John grapples with the embodied experience of his two bodies: his earlier youthful body, that he has lived with and prefers, but that he sees slipping through his fingers and he laments losing. He is now experiencing an ageing body of which certain attributes are *othered* as if parts of a machine needing fixing and separate from himself. While in the social milieu *John's* ageing is not visible, he can see and feel his body's decline from within. Realising that his preferred self is under threat, in an effort to regain control and hang on to that familiar self, *John* resists his physical decline by engaging in even more physical training and exercise.

While *John* started out somewhat gingerly in the beginning, he eventually did open up. Allowing me to broach the subject further with him, *John* went on to address age being a subject not discussed in the organisation:

> *"**Nooooo…here…noooooo**…once the dancer feels that they.….but there is no rule that at 42 years of age you have to compulsorily retire…[…]….because the maturity that mature dancers offer can be wonderful. They offer different works. There is no reason for them to do Balanchine variations…" (L. 377-395) John (36 M)*

As if unable to bring himself to even utter the words relating to decline or ageing, *John* halts partway through his sentence. Instead, he deflects away from age to compare

the open-ended nature of UK retirement versus practices in Continental European ballet companies. *John* appears anxious about the prospect of his career coming to an end, and as if to shield himself from the prospect of retirement, *John* acclaims the merits of retaining older dancers, implying that he could add value for some time to come.

A further opportunity presented itself for me to address the question of age and retirement with *Clara*, but as the dialogue below reflects, it was an area that was off-limits for her too.

> *Q: At your Company, is there an expected retirement age for da….[ncers]?*
>
> *A: [interjecting, she responded] No… This company, eermmm, does not have an age limit in reality. You can dance until the age you wish or you are able to … or they [company management] consider [that you can]… but there is no law imposing a retirement age.*
>
> *Q: How is the topic of ageing discussed in your Company?*
>
> *A: I am not very involved in that. I never had….to date….[sounding as if wanting to distance herself from the topic]*
>
> *Q: …I see…no…no..mmmm…[stalling….inviting her to continue]*
>
> *A: I have only been here for two years, and everybody that left the company went on to continue to dance with other companies or because they left ballet for personal reasons. In reality, I do not know anybody, to be honest, that had transitioned because of age, or was transitioned [by ballet staff]…*
>
> *Q: Are company members relatively young?*
>
> *A: Yes, to be honest, yes. There are very few of us in our thirties. We are five… in our thirties, and the two eldest principals are aged 36…So to tell you the truth, I am not involved in that [topic]*
>
> *Q: Is this a topic that is discussed in Company meetings?*
>
> *A: Nope….*
>
> *Q: Not discussed in the open?*
>
> *A: Nope…. (L. 225-239) Clara (31 F)*

As if guarding herself against something undesirable and that makes her feel vulnerable, *Clara* was palpably impatient with discussing the notion of age. It was by way of her curt responses, that signalled to me that age was something that she was not prepared to discuss, probably because of the precariousness of her career. *Clara* revealingly separates herself from a couple of 'older' principal dancers in the company

suggestive of her feeling vulnerable and therefore endeavouring to distance herself from something unwanted.

Permeating through *John* and *Clara's* quotes was a sub-culture that does not appear to countenance conversations around age in the open and its influence does not appear to end with career transitioning or retirement. Even a decade after career transitioning, the impact of this cultural influence within the occupation can be observed:

> *"Yeah. And you get away with it when you're young, and then suddenly the day will come when you're…….….. 'OK'…………" (L. 1864-1865) Tracy (48 F)*

Almost as if re-living the experience of her body letting her down, *Tracy* finds herself unable to utter the words that follow, leaving me to complete the meaning for myself. Her body's decline is too emotive a memory for her to articulate. With a hint of guilt for having taken her younger body for granted, *Tracy* laments its loss and cannot seem to reconcile herself with the passing of her youth, her career, and her occupational identity.

For the younger participants, the notion of age(ing) was a concept too far to visualise per se. Their lived experience of age, however, was related to their perception of their occupational horizon and how long they believed they had to achieve their objectives. This section illustrates the challenges I faced with getting active dancers to engage with the topic of ageing at work. My participants who had already transitioned, and those still active but in the autumn of their careers, were somewhat more forthcoming provided I observed the sensitivity of the topic for them and approached it with due caution and respect.

7.4.2.2 The Final Curtain

In this sub-theme, my participants address their lived experiences of having aged within the ballet career. I firstly present pertinent quotes from participants that have already career transitioned and their reflections on their ageing experiences prior to career transitioning. I then address my more seasoned active dancers' experiences that brought into focus the degree of fragility of the career, the sense of helplessness and loss, and the strategic approaches taken to mitigate the impact of having been let down by their bodies at a crucial time in their lifetime.

I start this section by presenting a divergent case. While, ordinarily, the majority of dancers would be thinking of career transitioning in their late 30s, *Nelly* was returning from a period of maternity leave. She was reflecting on her embodied experiences as an older dancer:

> *"…for me it was great when I had to stop when I had the pregnancy because I wasn't off for a year with an injury, I was off because I was pregnant and that helped to heal other injuries…that gave me a re-start mentally and physically…it gave me a re-start in my forties…" (L. 633-638) Nelly (51 F)*

'Othering' her body as a fertile body, *Nelly* reconfigured her identity as a mother and was able to distance herself from her ballerina-self. The pressure-free respite from having to meet her ballerina demands empowered her to re-energise herself for a re-start. *Nelly* contrasts her positive experience of being away from work pregnant and flourishing versus taking a similar amount of time off due to anxiety-provoking injury. She returned to work in a state of mental and physical preparedness that, in addition to giving birth to a new life, allowed her to experience a re-birth of her own ballet career.

Having returned to dance in her 40s, *Nelly* recalls the changed environment that she encountered where a younger cohort had been making inroads during her absence. Confronted with the situation, she recognised that she needed to take a strategic approach to securing roles that she *preferred* to dance:

> *"…the roles I did not prefer to do were the roles that were probably preferable for a director to give to a younger artist. So, I was very lucky in that way. I was happy to give up 'Swan Lakes' and 'Sleeping Beauties' and 'Nutcrackers' and all of those roles…. and 'Coppelias'….they were all the roles that the younger dancers need to do before they move on to…. eerrrr…..the more emotionally driven roles, I think. Just generally speaking, not…not all, not all of the pieces but, you know, need maturity. For something like 'Manon' or particularly for 'Mayerling' or even for 'Juliet' you have to be fresh but you have to know how to carry that role across the footlights. It's better to be slightly older and youthful or be very youthful and brilliant. But, sometimes….youth doesn't mean a great performance, and sometimes someone older that hasn't kept their technique or youth… that doesn't work either…so it's a matter of trying* ***to be clever*** *about the roles that you dance as you are developing as an artist." (L. 242-250) Nelly (51 F)*

Confronted with the possibilities of a challenge by the Artistic Director in favour of the younger dancers, and mindful that the big classics are technique-building ballets more suited to them, *Nelly* proactively surrendered those roles rather than risk deselection. What was revealing of *Nelly's* vulnerability was her need to differentiate herself from her peers. In the process she reveals the pressure of having to maintain her youthful looks and technique despite increasing age. Perceiving herself as an evolving artist, she strategically carved out a niche for herself, enabling her to then concentrate on those more artistically demanding roles. In this process of exchange to secure casting, *Nelly* protected her occupational identity and self-worth by dancing roles that

required a greater depth of artistry, knowledge and experience. Ironically, this led to *Nelly* experiencing the most '*interesting time of [her] career'* (L. 662).

Nelly's career revival experience is more the exception than the rule. Sustaining a ballet career even at young chronological age can be challenging. *David*, for example, at the age of 27 already had his second knee operation:

> *"I had this second knee operation so it dawned on me 'look, you've got to start thinking about what are the next steps'. Because I know the reality of it, you don't want to leave it so long and then fall off the edge of the cliff, I thought you've got to prepare, you have to prepare." (L. 773-776) David (40 M)*

David deploys a powerful metaphor to emphasise the crushing impact and deep sense of loss and devastation that a sudden, unplanned, career termination can bring about. At 27, sensing that his body may not be able to withstand for much longer the intense physicality that classical ballet demands, *David* conveys his concern and vulnerability. He then delves deeper into his experiences:

> *"…I had done all of the lead roles that there were to do, they were all coming back for a second time and I thought 'my God this is…' you know, but you think…I already felt old at 27, the ballet world can make you feel that, once you're beyond 25 you think 'ooh, starting to get a bit downhill'. You know your artistry is going up, your technical ability may be going down…[...] I knew I had to…. [stop dancing]…. I knew that I couldn't do it for ever, so it was a* ***real*** *bittersweet time for me because I* ***absolutely*** *loved that period." (L. 762-780) David (40 M)*

David commends his past achievements as if endeavouring to cushion the '***real*** *bittersweet'* impact from his injured body on his occupational identity and self. In the process, he reveals a dichotomous embodied experience of living in a body that is progressively losing the ability to sustain his career, while enjoying continued artistic growth. He laments '*feeling old at 27'* as if grieving and yearning for his previously fitter body that, despite his best efforts, gradually surrendered to injury. Shining a light on the fragile and short nature of the ballet career, where the body inevitably succumbs to injury or ageing with its concomitant implications for the self, *David* reveals how much being a ballet dancer and having that career means to him. Transcending his rationalisation that he '*couldn't do it forever',* the reality of him having to end his performing career, and the enormity of his decision, erupts into sudden emotion preventing him from completing the sentence: *'I knew I had to….'* and the words *'stop dancing'….* remained too raw for him to even articulate.

In *David's* case, the injuries spoke for his future. While *Tracy* embodied ageing experiences aligned somewhat with *David's*, she introduces the notion of being more attuned to her body:

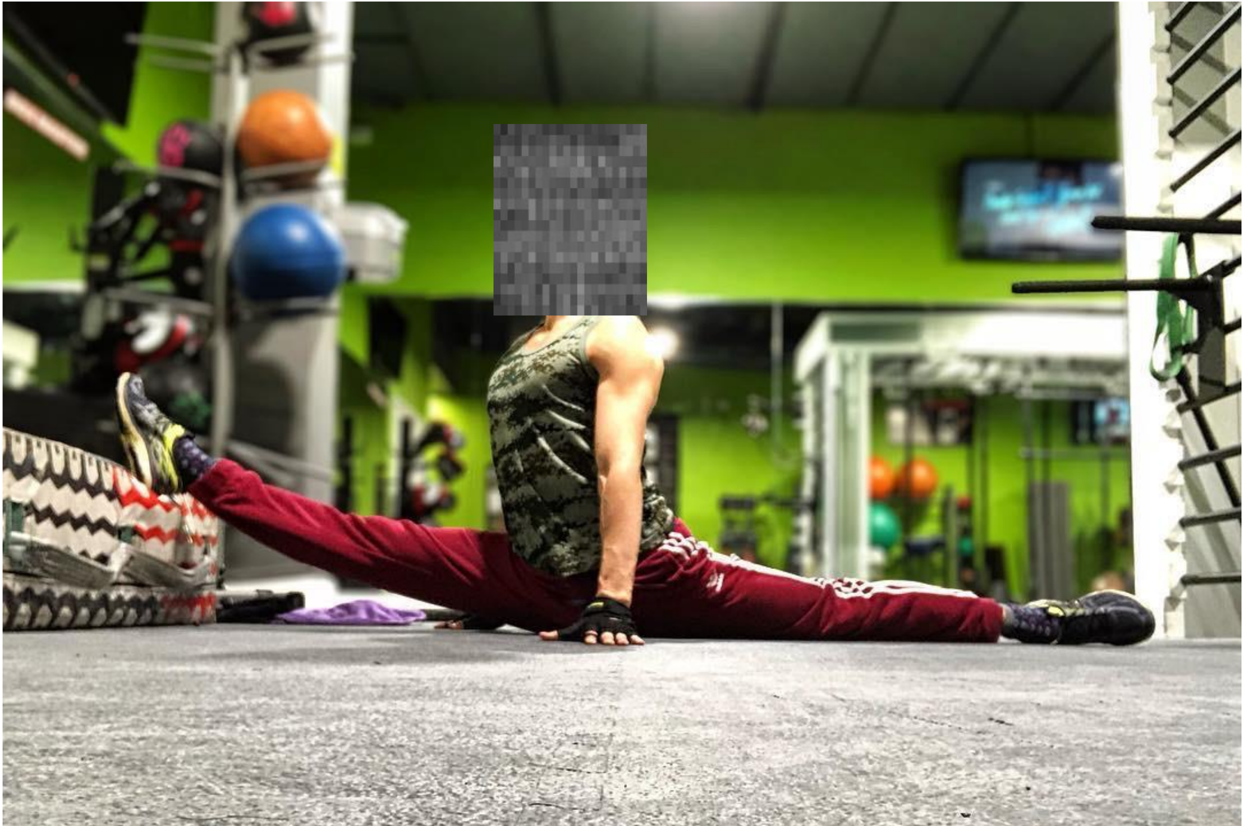
"…by the time I was about 25 to late 20s I really started to notice that it [her body] was not recovering the way it used to and, you know a lot of things would be a struggle. A lot of…most of it is to do with recovery. So, in your 20s you can work really, really hard. I mean I remember tours when I was on in 4 Acts of Sleeping Beauty, and a triple bill, and people would be injured, and we'd do extra shows. And I just ***thrived on it****, and then I'd be up the next day and look forward to morning class and then everything could get going. And then, come your late 20s you realise, you start to realise, that actually you're still really sore the whole of the next day. And what you start to learn is that you have to start to listen to your body more and know…and be a bit smarter about how you rehearse things….". (L. 1821-1864) Tracy (48 F)*

As if regretting not having listened to her body earlier, *Tracy* yearns for a lost self. She refers to a time, in her early 20s, where she recalls and highlights the degree of empowerment she derived from the sheer strength of her body, something that, through wear and tear, was gradually eroded by the time she was in her late 20s. Submitted to a gruelling schedule, her earlier taken-for-granted flourishing self was lost and replaced by a sapped, objectified, body that feels different and requires conscious effort. Significantly, *Tracy* struggles with a now hostile body that no longer can be automatically relied upon, and that disruptively talks back to her through the universal language of pain. Unable now to ignore this boundary, *Tracy* engages in the exchange required from her now objectified body as if to navigate a bridge between action and rest. In the process, *Tracy* casts light on the temporal dimension of her balletic body.

This temporality was similarly addressed by my active participants who were in the latter part of their active careers.

Finding himself in the intersection where his body image signalled in one direction whilst his subjective lived experience was quite the opposite, *John* explained what additional interventions he now needs to deploy to keep his body strong and fit. *John* presented an image of himself at the gym and talked about his current relationship with his body:

Figure 7 - John at the Gym



Discussing the photo, *John* contrasted his current relationship with his balletic body with that of his younger self:

> *"…everything was a lot easier! Maybe it was easier because I did not have to think about these things…I don't know [shrugging his shoulders]… but now I think about it all the time…..because I feel stiff and I have to do a lot of stretching and massages to keep up…as you get older, particularly for boys, you start feeling it in your back because of having to lift and partner the ballerinas …you feel it in your back…that [the lifting] takes a toll on your back and, at the same time, we have to remain flexible to do an arabesque …and all of those things…so…with the passing of the years, I feel that the flexibility in my back has changed a bit but…yes, I feel it [he rubs his back]…" (L.335-338) John (36 M)*

The photo above unveils the tension between *John's* fit and flexible image and the contrast with his narrative, shining a light on his gnarly lived experience of that body. Contrasting his past self, where his body did not appear in his consciousness, *John* now feels the loss and yearning for that past self that used to respond automatically to his command. *John* now experiences a different body where he has to consider its inner workings, and deploy conscious effort and interventions, to keep at bay the intrusiveness of overall stiffness. He quickly and repeatedly narrows down the epicentre of this intrusion to his back, as if endeavouring to re-assure himself that the remainder of his

body is not that badly affected. In doing so, he protects and defends his occupational identity.

Delving deeper, *John* offers a profound insight into his embodied experience of the morning-after dancing the previous night, contrasting this yet again with his younger self:

> *"… **Look**…. you do a performance one night…go to bed and the next morning…you try to get out of bed and you are crippled…you can hardly walk (he chuckles)….but that's normal. Well, I say it is normal, but I suppose that it is not normal for someone who has not lived that. The point is that when I was younger, I did not feel any of that. I could dance regularly but did not feel any of this…" (L.339-341) John (36 M)*

John's repeated evocation of his younger self is revealing of his inner turmoil of having to deal with an overwhelmingly aching body appearing into his consciousness. He now lives a body that feels '*crippled'*, an experience that is so contrasting with his younger self, intense, and all-encompassing that he does not alienate any parts of it. It is he who is crippled. Then, in an about turn as if attempting to transcend his aching and disrupted self, *John* normalises his experience, seemingly surrendering himself to the influences of the ballet sub-culture.

Repetition is at the heart of ballet technique used by ballet dancers to embody the choreography. Now experiencing an ageing balletic body that is unable to keep up with everyday ballet demands had significant implications for *Maria*:

> *"…because there is a moment now where I can only, you know, work with people that either **know me** or that understand where I am at, because I can't repeat 100 times, I can't just do 100 repetitions. I can't…. You know if something doesn't work, in the past I would have repeated it, and repeat it, and repeat it until it became a **second skin and it would work**. Now I don't… now I can't… now I have to have **faith**. It's like I do three repetitions, if it doesn't work – don't worry, I'll try tomorrow again… I'll try to be…. you know… **better**. But I can't do it anymore, otherwise you won't see me tomorrow, or the day after, or the day after [that]…" (L. 695-701) Maria (42 F)*

Conveying a palpable sense of despair while simultaneously wrestling with the loss of her younger self and struggling to come to terms with a body that she can no longer call on, *Maria* seeks shelter in familiar associations. Feeling vulnerable, she relies now on external latitude and empathy from those with whom she is more familiar. Using a metaphor to describe how her younger self would have embodied the learning through repetition, she laments the decline of her body and bewails the lost capability. No matter how much she now tries to save herself, her ageing body bitterly lets her down, leaving her powerless. Living in an older balletic body without the ability to develop that '*second*

skin' leaves her vulnerable and exposed. Repetition no longer has the effect of delivering the expected results and compounds the problem by rendering her ineffective for days. The resulting tension leaves her in an irreconcilable situation.

Maria's struggle to cope with the demands of her role leads to her feeling marginalised in the company. She adds insight into her lived experience of having become an older dancer amongst a cohort of much younger colleagues:

> *"…although nowadays **I feel the one who is more isolated**, because of course they've [younger dancers] outdone me, because now I'm **right** at the back of the door. And so now most of the people, you know up and coming and also they're younger, **much younger** than you, and so you're like 'uuuggh, alright, they've outdone me, you know, there is more younger than oldies like me'. Eeerrm…so **I do feel inadequacy**, I do, yeah. Because **it's fresh, it's beautiful, it's fresh**, and I feel like I've been rolled quite a few times. You know I might be shiny but that's because…I've been rolling for years. The truth? The truth, no… I don't know…. **how do I deal with it?.....** Erm…[…long pause…]…**badly** [she chuckles] probably [she chuckles again]. It's quite….it's a shock because you are there in the studio with so many youngsters …[…]…I don't know, sometimes I get quite depressed really [she chuckles uncomfortably]. (L. 857-885) Maria (42 F)*

This quote captures *Maria's* profound sense of inner despair and helplessness in the face of up-and-coming younger dancers populating the studio. She feels as if she has been repeatedly pushed aside and cannot even bring herself to recognise them as human ('*it is fresh'*) she struggles with the changing face of the studio. Feeling stale and defeated by her ageing body, she struggles with her sense of identity, now different and alienated from the majority younger set. The shock that *Maria* experienced, while suggestive of a denial of the inevitability of ageing and career transition, seems more related to the enormity of the event of having to stop dancing, putting an end to her performing career, and what that represents for her occupational identity. Unable to identify with a younger cohort, and uncertain of her post-dancing career future, rudderless, she is experiencing a deep sense of loss. Despite committing decades of training, preparation, and unrelenting work, as much as *Maria* tries to adapt, her body eventually lets her down, becoming the ultimate betrayal.

7.5 Conclusion

This study explored how professional ballet dancers experience their embodied occupational identity, and how ageing influences the lived experience of being a ballet dancer. Professional ballet is a remunerated full-time occupation, yet it is poorly understood as work (Kelman, 2000). Accordingly, amongst my motives to undertake this

study were: to make a contribution within the realm of OS to the knowledge of ballet as work; highlight the role of the subject lived body in relation to occupational identity; and the multi-layered complexity of conceptualising age for the purpose of organising work.

Situated in a small participant sample typical of an IPA study, I illustrate those convergences, divergences, and nuances of my participants lived experiences (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). In as much detail as possible, my study gives voice to my participants and, in so doing, sheds new light derived from idiographic observations. As such, I acknowledge that my findings may not be relevant to any other participant or study context.

Informing the discussion of my findings, I present below a table that reflects each participant's contribution to the constituent themes making up the super-ordinate themes.

Table 19 - Themes by Participant

Theme	On a Different Plane	Choreographers Want Blood	Pursuing the Idealised Body	Body as a Tool	The Artist Within	Shades of Passion	Sacrifice	The Reluctance PDD	Final Curtain
Audrey	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Beatrice	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Clara	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
David	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓
Fiona	✓	✓		✓		✓			
John	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Maria					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nelly	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓
Patricia		✓			✓	✓	✓		
Sandra			✓	✓	✓	✓			
Tracy		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Victor	✓				✓	✓	✓		

I identified three super-ordinate themes, each with a series of sub-themes set out below. Commencing with my participants' pursuit of the aspirational balletic identity '*Pursuing the Dream'*, I firstly address their perception of ballet's transformational power transporting them to 'A *Different Plane to the Rest of the World*'. The aspirational balletic identity is underpinned by the notion of the idealised bodily aesthetic '*Pursuing the Idealised Body'*. '*Pursuing the Dream'* also addresses my participants' experiences of organisational influences 'C*horeographers Want Blood! on them*'.

The second super-ordinate theme: '*Mirror, Mirror on the Wall*…' addresses the objective body. This is where the visible '*Body as a Tool'* is worked *on*, and *with*. Here, my participants laid bare the tensions between the requirements for the idyllic form and the contrasting wider attributes needed to constitute the holistic ballet dancer. Most of

my participants challenged the notion that a complete ballet dancer is solely their body aesthetic. They argued that, instead, the ballet artist *('The Artist Within')* is more holistically constituted of a balanced 'package' comprising bodily aesthetic; technical skills; and artistic interpretation.

Navigating the '*Shades of Passion and Sacrifice',* my participants unveiled their subjective lived experiences of what it is like to be them '*On the Other Side of the Curtain*'. This third super-ordinate theme encompasses dancing a '*Reluctance Pas de Deux'* where my participants revealed just how sensitive an issue ageing is to them. I conclude my study by addressing my more seasoned participants in '*The Final Curtain'* sub-theme*,* where they reveal their experiences of what it is like to inhabit a youthful looking, but occupationally ageing, body.

My study reveals that my participants navigate tensions between three notions of the body: the idealised (Foster, 1997), object, and subject bodies (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). These tensions constitute the embodied balletic occupational identity, simultaneously conveying a sense of reflection, constrained agency, and of '*being done to'* by the ballet sub-culture. Expressed through the nuances, these tensions are enshrined in the range of divergences and paradoxes constituting my participants' individual experiences. For example, some of my participants wanted to be classical ballet dancers, became professional ballet dancers, but they did not have the right aesthetic. Other participants who had the right aesthetic, also became professional ballet dancers but preferred contemporary dance or sought to follow another artform. Even those who conformed to the 'idealised' aesthetic for classical ballet objectified their bodies and treated them as *tools*, which they considered to be something needing to be continually worked on.

I build on the broader extant literature, beyond OS that has, thus far, addressed various aspects of ballet dancers' training, well-being, and identity at adolescent, pre-professional training stage and post-career transition phase (e.g.: Roncaglia, 2007; Pickard, 2015; Willard and Lavallee, 2016; Mitchell, Haase and Cumming, 2021). Little focus however has been placed on active professional ballet dancers, and on them as workers. In particular, my study builds on three ethnographic studies that focused on the active dancing phase (Wulff, 1998, 2001, 2008; Aalten, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2007; Turner and Wainwright, 2003; Wainwright and Turner, 2003, 2004, 2006; Wainwright and Williams, 2005; Wainwright, Williams and Turner, 2005, 2006). My findings are in some respects consistent with these works. Where my study adds knowledge in relation to the inclusion of the subject body is in the tensions between the troika of bodies and what it is like for my participants to be them (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). In so doing, I

approach the embodied occupational identities of my participants from the perspective of the individual, rather than the organisation.

This study was also informed by the ongoing iterative process of my own reflexive practice, given my past background as a ballet dancer and my subsequent experiences as human resources manager in the banking sector. Having recognised the overlap between the two contexts and cultures, I engaged in this process to address intruding fore-understanding and preconceptions which could have influenced the analysis process and my meaning-making through reflexive practice. I recorded these observations in a separate chapter (Chapter 4).

All of my participants lived their subject bodies, where they experienced what it was like to be them. This included aspects such as: the impact of workload on their bodies; the consequences of the reverse mask of ageing (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1991, p. 382); and how that influenced their occupational identity.

8 Chapter 8: Discussion, Contributions and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

There is growing interest in OS in recognising the significance of the body in our understanding of work and organising (Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2021; Lawrence, et al., 2022). Responding to the call to "look beyond talk" (Corlett, et al, 2015 p. 411) and to bring the material body into focus in relation to occupational identity in OS (Knights and Clarke, 2017) I sought to contribute to the burgeoning stream of research by studying an embodied occupation. I focused on how my individual participants, professional ballet dancers, experienced their embodied occupational identity. I also investigated the influence of age(ing) on their lived experiences of being a ballet dancer.

I reviewed the contributions made by various schools of thought in the literature and, through an iterative process of updating, considered further aspects informed by my data. Building on the recognition of the role of the body in identity in OS, I concluded that, to better understand the nuances of individual lived experience, I should embrace a phenomenological stance (Gill, 2020). The centrality of the body has been highlighted in more recent empirical work (e.g.: Simpson and Simpson, 2018; van Amsterdam and van Eck, 2019; Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2021; Jammaers and Ybema, 2022) as central to the study of identity. In this chapter I answer the research questions and consider my contributions to knowledge and application. I also make recommendations emanating from my findings.

8.2 Research Question 1 (RQ1)

For my participants, the first point of identification was through their aspiration to become a professional ballet dancer and '*Pursuing the Dream*'. This is where they encountered the idealised, or aspirational identity. This aspirational identity was ensconced in the discursively constructed idealised body shaped by the balletic sub-culture (DiBenigno, 2022). Through the process of socialisation and immersion in the rigorous training programmes at vocational ballet school, ballet dancers experienced a sense of specialness, and of being transported to *a 'different plane to the rest of the world'* (Pickard, 2015). Once in the system, both vocational ballet schools and within the elite ballet companies, dancers soon encountered the hierarchical and powerful management structure. They found themselves subjected to close surveillance and controls in order to meet the organisational demands (McEwen and Young, 2011; Whiteside and Kelly, 2016). This aligns with Foucauldian thought where the body is docile, socially constructed and remains abstract (Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2021). In this abstract world, where powerful discourses influence individual thinking and

behaviour, it is their passion and desire that motivates them to strive towards those idyllic aspirations (Costas and Grey, 2014).

The idealised balletic form was universally acknowledged by my participants and the literature largely purports this idealised form to be the key determinant (Wainwright, Williams and Turner, 2006; Pickard, 2013). Accounts varied amongst my participants. *Beatrice, Clara, and Nelly* self-identified as being gifted with having bodily attributes that aligned with the idealised balletic aesthetic. They felt empowered by this congruence. *Audrey* and *Victor* also had aligning aesthetic but, differing with others, did not experience a sense of empowerment. Conversely, those that self-identified as less well aesthetically aligned with the aesthetic for ballet included *David, John, Maria, Patricia, Sandra, and Tracy.* While they acknowledged that the idealised ballet aesthetic existed, these latter participants did not concur that meeting the idealised balletic aesthetic criterion was the singular determining factor in becoming a successful ballet dancer (Zeller, 2017). Looking across all of the accounts, I found that wider parameters were at play, based mainly on having good overall bodily proportions and the ability to develop technique (McCormack, et al., 2019). In addition, nuances reflected that the ability to embrace artistry, musicality, and to possess good intelligence were important criteria in order to be a successful ballet dancer (Jankovic and Bogaerts, 2020).

My findings confirmed that my participants were driven by their calling and passion for the artform (Wainwright and Turner, 2004; Roncaglia, 2007). In an effort to earn recognition by the balletic sub-culture and observing gaps between their object bodies and the idealised balletic body, my participants sought to make sense of what constitutes the 'right' body for ballet (Wainwright and Turner, 2003; Pickard, 2013). This pursuit gave rise to tensions relating to how each individual differentially identified with that body. For those that considered themselves to have a conforming body, the process appeared to be less onerous, and even empowering. Within the extant literature, this appears to be the predominant case where ballet dancers are said to become their bodies (Pickard, 2013; Markula, 2015).

Divergent accounts, however, reflected that, despite not possessing the idealised form, *Sandra (26 F)* and *Tracy (48 F)* strongly identified with the balletic identity (van Amsterdam and van Eck, 2019). I identified that this elicited an array of feelings of anxiety towards their bodies, inadequacy, eating disorders, the rejection of that idealised form as "*a complete alien*" (*Tracy, 48 F, L. 1068*) or "*creature*" (*Sandra, 26 F, L. 433*). In one case (*Tracy*), even expressed hatred towards her own body (*L. 1531*). These existential tensions build on the findings of Zeller (2017) and McCormack, et.al., (2019) where they also questioned the validity of the traditional balletic aesthetic taking precedence over the holistic profile of a dancer.

Addressing specific participants that felt constrained by possessing the idealised balletic form, *Audrey* (*39 F*), for example, had a physique "*very suited to the classics*" *(L. 416)* but did not experience a sense of ballet becoming her body (Caza, Moss and Vough, 2018). Far from it, she found that the socially ascribed identity limited her ability to explore wider interests. In another example, *Victor (47 M),* whilst self-identifying as having "*a really good shape*" for the occupation *(L. 1188)* rejected the balletic identity outright. My findings thus run counter the extant literature where ballet dancers were held to become their bodies (Turner and Wainwright, 2003; Beech and Broad, 2020) and instead found individual differential identification with the occupation.

My participants found themselves immersed, and responding to, the autocratic demands of the vocational educational system and ballet company management (McEwen and Young, 2011). Coming to terms with the degree of command and control that prevails within the balletic occupation was, yet a further tension related to my participants' *Pursuing the Dream*. Expressing her experiences of the level of demand within the company, a seasoned dancer, *Nelly (51 F, L. 580)* described it as "*the choreographers want blood because they want the best*". She pointed to the degree of acceptance of the authoritarian approach and the demand for obedience inherent in the craft (Green, 2001; Aalten, 2005; Ritenburg, 2010; Moola and Krahn, 2018). This led, at times, to perfectionistic tendencies in their endeavour to achieve those high performing requirements.

This behaviour was taken to the literal extreme, during a studio rehearsal, where *Clara* (*31 F*) continued to dance whilst having her request for respite declined by the choreographer. Her predicament was only acknowledged when she was seen to be bleeding through her pointe shoe. The stain visible on the satin ballet shoe was the symbolic mark of the material contribution her body was making to the artform (Simpson and Simpson, 2018). So profound was her experience of this event that she felt driven to photograph the imprinted pain and injury associated with the craft (e.g.: McEwen and Young, 2011; Vassallo, et al., 2019). This brings into focus the need for greater understanding of how the embodied element of work is experienced by the individual to inform organisational behaviour (Simpson and Simpson, 2018).

Reflecting on his early years' vocational ballet school experiences as "*frightening stuff, absolutely frightening stuff*" (L. 204) *David's* (40 M) account exemplifies the degree of fear and anxiety experienced by a number of my participants in the occupation (Moola and Krahn, 2018). Whilst high levels of discipline and control were expected from management (McEwen and Young, 2011; Whiteside and Kelly, 2016), unbridled fear was an experience not fitting in vocational education and the workplace. There is a paucity of research on the topic of fear amongst ballet dancers (Moola and Krahn, 2018).

However, given the frequency with which it was referred to in my participants accounts and the potential ramifications for balletic careers and beyond, there is a case to be made for further research to be undertaken.

Objectifying or *othering* their bodies (Jackson, 2005), my participants distanced themselves from their object body as a way of alleviating the tensions between their perceived selves and the high performing objectives they desired their bodies to achieve. In response, they worked on, with and through their bodies as if they were separate entities from themselves, and as if their bodies were work tools (Green, 1991, 2001; Alexias and Dimitropoulou, 2011). In line with the notion of "perfectionistic striving", my participants focused on interventions, leading to performance improvement (Nordin-Bates and Kuylser, 2021, p. 212). However, they mostly engaged in individually-led efforts (e.g.: diet, and exercise regimes) in order to achieve those high ideals that may not have been optimal in terms of their health and well-being in the workplace (McNarry, Allen-Collinson and Evans, 2020).

The perception of their bodies being work tools, separate from themselves, also 'normalised' the practice of pummelling their bodies when they found that the body did not always respond to their command. Some took it to the point of maltreatment "***really…poor body***!...) (*Clara, 31 F, L. 200*); "*starving and bingeing*" (*Tracy, 48 F, L. 90*) (Nordin-Bates and Abrahamsen, 2016). I found this negative connotation of perfectionism was instrumental in leading the individual to passionate dark side behaviours (Nordin-Bates and Kuylser, 2021). The "visual tyranny of ballet" (Gottschild, 2003, p. 139) and the focus on the object-body having to meet the subjective criteria associated with the idealised body, displaced the artistic qualities of dance in favour of form (Zeller, 2017). This resulted in tensions between the aesthetic and bodily focus of management on the one hand, and the holistic interpretation by my participants of what constituted being a ballet dancer on the other. These tensions gave rise to vulnerability both within the ballet dancers themselves, but also in respect of their relationship with ballet management. Here too, the notions of high performance and perfectionism run deep and underpin many of the drivers that led to both positive and dark side behaviours (Nordin-Bates and Kuylser, 2021). My study, therefore, makes the case for Butler's notion of radical cultural un/doing (Butler, 2004) in order to foster a greater degree of understanding and interventions that challenge the norms of the ballet sub-culture. This should bring about healthier organising (Australian Ballet, 2020).

Six of my participants made the case for ballet dancers to be viewed as multi-dimensional artists. In this theme, they highlighted three key attributes (in their terms: bodily aesthetics, technical skills and artistic interpretation) to converge to bring about the holistic interpretation of the choreography. *Sandra, for example,* eloquently posited

the notion of the "whole package" (*Sandra, 26 F, L. 426*) to be considered, rather than the visible physical attributes alone during casting. The notion of the artist is, in itself, multi-dimensional where my participants identified: musicality, performativity, and intelligence (*David, 40 M*), partnering skills (*Victor, 47 M*), spiritual contribution (*Clara, 31 F*), the ability to express yourself, transcending corporeality (*Tracy, 48 F*); creating ambiance, and being able to tell a story (*Sandra, 26 F*). These participants argued that the sole focus on the balletic aesthetic detracted from the contribution that ballet dancers made when those intangible dimensions are under-valued. In other words, they illuminated the constant tension lived between their perception of who they are as artists, and management's perception of who they are as dancers (Zeller, 2017).

My participants' sensemaking of their artistry can be related to that subjective notion of the body which is known only to the individual (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). *John's (36 M)* account referred to the "*artist [as] something that comes from within*" (*L. 185*) epitomising the need for ballet dancers to combine the aesthetic and technique of the object-body with the intangible artistic elements of the subject-body (Gilleard, 2022). It was this association of the physicality of the balletic artform combined with the intangible and emotive elements that shone a light on my participants lived experience of being a ballet dancer. Describing it as "*a way of life, it's like a religion*…" (L. 1645) *Beatrice* (*18 F*) recounted the extent to which she experienced the artform as a calling (Bonneville-Roussy, Lavigne and Vallerand, 2011). Her account coincided with others where the positive power of passion drove them to engage wholeheartedly, giving their all to succeed at becoming ballet dancers (Vallerand, 2008). When everything aligned, *Nelly (51 F), for example,* described that she felt as if she "*was taking on the world*" (L. 127). This led to feelings of inner euphoria and a sense of succeeding (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

My participants were acutely aware though that they were dependent upon management recognising and casting them in ballets (McEwen and Young, 2011). Dancers found themselves trapped between their heightened inner sense of passion for the artform, their body's ability to respond to the demands of the choreography, and management's requirements for them to meet the scheduling. In the process, management exercised power, mobilising vulnerability in order to effect control (Butler, 2016). As a consequence, dancers embraced the notion of pain as a positive manifestation, and a sign that they were making progress in their development.

In the context of a short, hyper-competitive career, dancers were left with the dilemma to either respond to their bodies signalling pain and distress on the one hand, or to fulfil their desire to perform on the other (Aalten, 2007). They became exposed to management's decision-making in respect of casting and tended to throw caution to the

wind (Vassallo, et al., 2019; Bolling, et al., 2021). For example, *John* and *Fiona* strayed onto the dark side of passion driven by the socialised discursive notion of "good pain" (Howe, 2004, p. 200). The blurred boundary of 'good' and 'bad' pain, and injury (Bolling, et al. 2021) was instrumental in them silencing their bodies' signals of distress (Aalten, 2005). Perhaps they saw the boundaries of their material bodies to be a threshold to be crossed in pursuit of their passion (Aalten, 2007).

This behaviour highlights the intersection between the individual in respect of their passion and driving ambition juxtaposed the precarity of their situation in the face of organisational control. The impact of injury, evident in the images presented by *Fiona* (21 F) during the interview, vividly attested to the degree of pain and injury imprinted onto her body (Wulff, 1998; Wainwright and Turner, 2004, 2005; Aalten, 2005, 2007, Pickard, 2015; Simpson and Simpson ,2018; Vassallo, et al., 2019). To *Fiona* and *John*, pain constituted 'currency' in the social context of the ballet sub-culture (Pickard, 2015) and a mechanism through which they could respond to management's control (Butler, 2016). It was only when they were disabled by injury, and entirely prevented from dancing, that they acknowledged the severity and consequences of crossing those material boundaries (Tarr and Thomas, 2020).

Sacrifice did manifest in my participants accounts, pertaining predominantly to those familial, social, and extra-mural activities that they were foregoing in order to pursue a balletic career. Subjugation of the self to the collective occupational identity was seen by some as an important sacrifice (Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann, 2006). Others encountered significant life events that introduced a re-definition of the self. Some saw the introduction of additional competing social identities that then resulted in them having to sacrifice one, the other, or both to some degree (Caza, Moss and Vough, 2018). In my study, I found a continuum of responses to this dilemma where some would give up almost everything in favour their balletic career (i.e.: "*I'll do anything to do this part*" (*Tracy, 48 F, L.65*); and "*I [pause] am going to be a dancer **always***" (*John, 36 M, L.* 278). On the other hand, there were those that sought to balance their extra-mural life with a ballet career (e.g.: *Clara*; *Nelly*; *Patricia*); and those that favoured their extra-mural life in pursuit of wider interests, abandoning their balletic career (e.g.: *Audrey*).

Audrey, Nelly, and Patricia sought to balance their ballet careers simultaneously with motherhood. It was the contrast between *Patricia's* joyful response to the grey, angular, inanimate image of a parking ticket machine in the photograph that conveyed the strength of her feelings towards her family. That image triggered her emotions, shining a light on the sacrifices that she was making, on the one hand, to be a professional ballet dancer, and on the other being a mother. It was the combination of the impact of the visual image that *Patricia* discussed and the double-hermeneutic

embedded in IPA that brought to life a deeper understanding of the extent of her existential dilemma (Kirkham, Smith and Havsteen-Franklin, 2015; Kings, Knight and Moulding, 2020). *Patricia* (*35 F, L. 556*) was living a life of double sacrifice in order to balance her desires to retain both identities. *Nelly (51 F, L. 638)* experienced a career revival after her maternity break and relished giving birth to a new life that allowed her to experience a re-birth of her own balletic career. *Audrey (39 F, L. 535)*, conversely, experienced inner agony with these competing identities and made the choice of abandoning her balletic career in favour of motherhood.

Despite my participants' awareness of the wear and tear, injury, and occupational decline associated with the craft, none of them made mention of the body being sacrificed in the pursuit of the artform. This behaviour is indicative of the strength and power of the socialisation and training inherent in the discursively constructed idealised notion of the balletic body (Foucault,1977). It is this power that simultaneously overrides the material object body and the lived subject body inherent in the individual's occupational identity (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962).

This behaviour is indicative of the lack of agency underlying my participants' experience of the occupation. In particular, the absence of agency gave rise to vulnerability from the very outset during vocational training (e.g.: *Beatrice and David*) and remained manifest throughout their careers. On the one hand, dancers were expected to excel and shine, but on the other, they needed "*to melt with the crowd*" (*Maria, 42 F, L 246*) in order to survive the balletic sub-culture. The temporal nature of the career had the effect of exacerbating their sense of vulnerability, particularly where recurrent injuries were present (e.g.: *David*). It also manifest towards the latter part of some careers where the occupational future time perspective became truncated and acute (Gielnik, Zacher and Wang, 2018). This led some participants to *other* certain 'offending' areas of their bodies, and to engage in dark side interventions in an effort to extend their fitness to continue to dance.

In summary, I identified that my participants occupational identities were entwined within three notions of the body. They had to navigate the tensions between the socially constructed discursive notion of the idealised body, that is at the centre of them acceding to the occupation. Their passion and desire were operationalised by management in order to exert power and control through their aspiration to emulate this image in their own bodies. My participants '*othered'* their body as a tool in order to place distance between themselves and that object body. It is here that they would engage in both constructive and obsessive behaviours depending upon the circumstances they found themselves in. Their behaviour was often influenced by the degree of perceived congruence between the object body and the idealised body.

My study extended the notions of the body to include the subject body as being integral to my participants' lived experience of their occupational identity (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). It was through the idiographic exploration of my participants individual accounts that shone a light on their nuanced experiences. Enshrined in these nuances were tensions where pain, injury, and the lack of agency gave rise to responses to their passion (the bright side, or the dark side) and sacrifices (McEwen and Young, 2011; Satama, 2015).

8.3 Research Question 2 (RQ2)

In the previous section, I answered RQ1 where I addressed how professional ballet dancers experienced their embodied occupational identity through tensions as they related to the three notions of the body. With the body being at the nexus of occupational identity, it has defining power over continuance of that occupation. In my study I observed that the body is not a static, inanimate mass but, instead, a dynamic entity that adapts to the changing environment. Accordingly, the individual engages in a process of adaptation in order to maintain the equilibrium between themselves and society (Crossley, 2001).

RQ2 arose, as discussed in the Introductory Chapter, from the multi-layered complexity of age(ing) and it being a material marker in enabling, and limiting, the balletic body (Riach and Cutcher, 2014). The positioning of age(ing) as an ongoing process that commences at birth and prevails throughout the individual's lifetime is a key consideration in how age(ing) is addressed in my study (Ilmarinen, 2001).

Age(ing) is a continually lived fleshy experience (Tulle, 2015) in which some dancers feel occupational ageing as early as their twenties, while others may be able and willing to dance well into their forties. Resembling the occupational future time perspective (Gielnik, Zacher and Wang, 2018), these two scenarios tended to differentially determine disposition, behaviour and outcome. The influences of age(ing), I found, related to participants at all phases, and all ages, during their active dancing careers, and beyond. I identified that some dancers felt their age(ing) well before it became visibly manifest on the object body (e.g.: "*People say that it does not show…but* **I see it** [implying that he *feels* it]" (*John, 36 M, L. 324*). This is in essence the converse of Featherstone and Hepworth's (1991) Mask of Ageing, confirming the observations in relation to ballet dancers by Wainwright and Turner (2006).

My study revealed that my more youthful participants (*Beatrice, 18 F; and Fiona 21 F*) engaged in setting short-term horizons in relation to what they perceive to be their future time perspective (FTP) (Gielnik, Zacher and Wang, 2018). This was exemplified

by *Fiona (21 F)* seeking to retain her "*old spot*" (L. 584) in a particular ballet production and if, through injury she was unable to participate, her career could be potentially set back. The meaning of losing her "*spot*" has to be seen in the context of a hyper-competitive environment (situated in the corps de ballet) where she could be easily replaced by a number of other dancers. The consequence for her is that it may take considerable time for her to work her way back up to the position that she held at that point, setting her career back in time. Whilst age per se was not mentioned in the dialogue at the interview with *Fiona*, I interpreted that it was the conflict between her 'lived time' (keeping her spot) and her 'chrononormative time' (taking time out to recover from her injury) that gave rise to *Fiona's* dark side behaviour (Grosz's interpretation of Bergsonian time as cited in Jack, Riach and Bariola, 2019). *Fiona* incurred an injury that could, and did, progress to the point where she was temporarily disabled, requiring surgery and a two-year convalescence (the chrononormative recovery time that she sought to avoid). *Fiona's* actions were thus counter-productive to her aims. The corollary to *Fiona's* case is where *Beatrice* (*18 F*) chose to forego an opportunity to join a prestigious elite ballet company in order to favour of taking time to allow for healing of an underlying injury. *Beatrice* took the opposite approach to *Fiona* where her FTP could be construed as longer-term in nature and strategically orientated towards the longevity of her career. The interpretation and understanding of time is thus an individually lived experience dependent upon each person's unique circumstances (Jack, Riach and Bariola 2019).

My more seasoned participants (*Clara; John; Maria; and Nelly*) engaged in self-directed behavioural modification, deploying innovation and creativity to adapt existing habits in favour of maintaining the longevity of their occupation. *John* (*36 M*) for example, engaged in dietary management and additional exercise interventions in order to maintain strength and aesthetics that he considered "*very important*" (*L. 316*). This arose in the context of him self-describing as feeling "*crippled*" (*L. 340*) the day after a normal performance. In a similar but somewhat unusual case in the balletic world, *Nelly* (*51 F*) extended her career well into her 40s despite the presence of an underlying hip injury. She was able to extend her career through strategically positioning herself in relation to younger peers. Both *John* and *Nelly* leveraged their bodily accumulated knowledge and experience to prolong their sojourn (Cutcher, Riach and Tyler, 2022). Ageing therefore is not a terminal event occurring after retirement, nor is it an event occurring only in the pre-retirement phase of working life. It is indeed an ongoing process that each individual lives uniquely throughout their lives and careers. Organisational engagement with the notion of age, within the normal course of work and across the full extent of the career, is thus a process that requires sensitivity and proactive intervention in organising work (Riach and Cutcher, 2014). According to extant literature, these sensitivities were not

always present in management behaviour (Roncaglia, 2007; McEwen and Young, 2011; Willard and Lavallee, 2016).

Ballet dancers' behaviours were also informed by their complicity with organisational management in the process of 'veiling' of age (Wulff, 2001). This 'veiling' was manifest in the sub-theme '*Ageing – The Reluctance Pas de Deux'*, where *John* and *Clara* revealed varying degrees of hesitancy to engage in dialogue in relation to their age(ing). Though my participants engaged in adaptive and restorative interventions to offset the decline in their physical bodies, they counter-intuitively did not engage with management due to the tacit norm that age was "*not discussed in the open*" (*Clara*, 31 F, *L. 239*) (Wulff, 2001). Given the impact and meaning of age(ing) to their ballet careers and identity, it is understandable that some of my participants were reluctant to discuss age(ing). However, by contrast, it was remarkable that they were willing to discuss injuries that could have an equally terminal effect upon their careers and identity. However, age(ing) remained out of bounds for them. Age(ing) confronts ballet dancers with their deepest fears (e.g.: de-selection; occupational decline: trying to be someone that they can no longer be) and represents their approaching the inevitable balletic first 'death' (Graham, 1991). 'Veiling' of age thus serves as a shield for the dancers against an event that is terminal in terms of their balletic career and occupational identity. The same veiling also serves as a mechanism that, in the hands of the organisations, may constitute a means of vampiric control that my participants feared (Riach and Kelly, 2015).

The consequence of the complicity in the veiling of age was that ballet dancers lived the tension of carnally experiencing their bodies age(ing) and not being in a position to seek support and formal interventions. As a result, they were left vulnerable and isolated (e.g.: *Maria*) having to cope both physically and psychologically with the naturally occurring process. These findings further support my earlier argument for the un/doing of linear chrononormative time (Riach, Rumens and Tyler, 2014) and, instead, for organising to be configured taking into account Bergsonian lived time interpretations (Jack, Riach and Bariola, 2019).

As ballet dancers age while developing their technique and artistry in a process of bodily accumulation, they develop skills that underpin their performativity (Cutcher, Riach and Tyler, 2022). In my study, my more seasoned participants experienced their physical peak at differential chronological ages. Beyond their physical peak, however, they all spoke of experiencing a continued ascendency in their artistry (Wainwright and Turner, 2006) whilst simultaneously compensating to maintain their physical performance (Baltes, et al., 2014). This bifurcation in these two skillsets, at a critical point in their balletic career gave rise to reflexive practice that, in turn, led to innovation and

modification of their routine (Marcoulatos, 2001). While the process of compensation sustained the technique and performance, enabling the maintenance of the body's moving equilibrium in relation to society/organisational demands (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962; Crossley, 2001), my participants retained a positive disposition towards their occupational identity (e.g.: *Clara, John, Nelly*). However, when eventually the biological body could no longer support the demands and compensatory efforts became ineffective, they became defeated, anxious, vulnerable, and isolated (e.g.: *Maria*). Career transitioning became a self-fulfilling prophecy where, perceiving the loss of performance and confidence, management, peers, and the participant herself 'consorted' to bring about the end of her ballet career.

Ultimately, the physical body is the arbiter and determinant - a material boundary that reaches a tipping point, '*The Ultimate Betrayal*', at which its moving equilibrium can no longer be maintained or restored (Crossley, 2001). This results in the inevitable career-transition '*The Final Curtain'* with its concomitant emotive, social, psychological, physical, financial, and occupational identity implications. It is the ultimate tipping point, where the body can no longer stay the pace, that is generally recognised in the literature as 'ageing'. My study shows that the process of age(ing) is encountered and experienced differentially throughout the career. Further research is required within the field of OS to more formally engage with alternative conceptualisations of age(ing), of all ages at work including the socially constructed dimensions such as organisational age but also deploying tenets of existential functional age as it relates to the body copying with occupational demands (McCarthy, et al. 2014).

In the context of a short, hyper-competitive career, the occupational future time perspective (FTP) (Gielnik, Zacher and Wang, 2018) of each individual has differential implications, from time to time, throughout the lifespan of a career where the body is at the centre of the task.

8.4 Confirmation of Research Quality (Methodological Integrity)

In this section, and in line with IPA protocol, I detail the process that I undertook to confirm the methodological rigor and research quality of this thesis. I deployed Yardley (2015) four principles to assess the quality of my research.

8.4.1 Sensitivity to Context

The literature review that I carried out was both sensitive and relevant in respect of the theoretical and empirical context. In particular, I paid close attention to the socio-

cultural context of ballet in the UK whilst taking cognisance of ethical issues surrounding the sensitive nature of the topics involved (e.g.: the personal nature of my participants' backgrounds, how and why they came to pursue a ballet career, the personal nature of injury, sacrifice, age and ageing). This process influenced the approach that I took to the guiding questions that I set and the order in which I would intend to present them. I also took into account my own balletic past and how that may have constrained my approach (Wilkinson, Joffe and Yardley, 2004). During the analysis process, I maintained trueness to my participants account whilst maintaining an open mind to alternative interpretations other than my own. In the Research Method chapter, I addressed the interface between my participants and myself, and how power sharing was facilitated through a friendship approach to my engagement with them. I also addressed the homogeneity requirements for the participant sample and how that related to my context and research questions.

From a practical perspective, I afforded as much latitude as possible to my participants to nominate the location, suitable time, and date for the interviews. In Chapter 4 I set out in detail the reflexive process that I followed, inter alia, to maintain sensitivity to the context.

8.4.2 Commitment and Rigour

In the Research Methodology (chapter 5), I set out in detail the philosophical underpinning for my study and the reasons for selecting IPA. In the Research Method (chapter 6), I set out how and why I selected my participants and what their relevance was to my research questions. I detailed the sample selection process with a focus on the depth and breadth as it related to my research questions. During the analysis process, I maintained compliance with the recommended IPA stepwise process (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) and honed my skill by attending specialist workshops and seminars relating to IPA. I also maintained contact with the online IPA Discussion Group where I sought guidance relating to the methodology and method and interacted with participants to further my skill and competence.

I maintained open channels of communication with my supervisors and sought guidance and direction in relation to every aspect of the process including literature review, reflexivity, methodology and method, and the analysis of my findings. Throughout the process, I bore in mind the nature of the study that I was undertaking, the environment in which my participants functioned, and the limitations relating to access and their ability to participate in the process.

8.4.3 Coherence and Transparency

In the process of writing up my findings, I paid due care and attention to my word selection and how they portrayed the nuances of my participants' experiences (Smith, 2011). I endeavoured to retain coherence and fit between my participants' sensemaking and my analytical interpretation of their experiences (Yardley, 2000). In so doing, I maintained congruence with the method and procedures inherent in IPA with a focus on clarity and coherence of argument that enhanced transparency and understanding. Throughout, I sought to balance the level of detail necessary with the flow of the narrative in order to enhance understanding.

In chapter 4, I discussed my reflexive journey through the preparation of this thesis and how that interleaved with the processes of my study. The reflexive process had an influence on a variety of aspects that permeated throughout my study. Reciprocally, various aspects of my study had an influence on me and my reflexive endeavours throughout. In the paragraphs that follow, I return to my reflexive ventures and conclude with reflections on what I have learned throughout this journey; what I would have done more of; differently; and less of. I speculate on how my experience of this Doctoral journey will influence my future career.

Reflecting on my notes at different stages of the reflexive journey, I am able to see and feel the changes that have taken place within me. The first realisation for me is that I was trying to replace ballet with something else in my life. Ballet, to me, is irreplaceable. Trying to replace it with something else is futile. Accepting that ballet would have inevitably ended in or around my late 30s, I can now accept that my post-ballet career is something additional to ballet rather than a replacement for that world. It has been hard for me to reflect in text the depth and extent of the emotive journey I have been on in this doctoral study, a journey that I am still traversing. Like a diamond, there are so many facets to it, but I have tried to convey my most salient experiences as closely as possible in the Reflexive chapter.

I started this research journey with a ballet outlook frozen in my mid-20s, and a youthful vision of the future that lived on in my memory. Having had the opportunity to explore the experiences of my participants that had a fuller career, I was enlightened to the challenges that they faced later in their careers. Whilst they had many more years of dancing, they also had many more years of challenges and having to deal with the slow physical decline that would ultimately terminate their careers, something I escaped. I also realise now that, had I had a full career in ballet, the inevitable career transition would have transpired maybe a decade and a bit later than it did. What I did observe through my participants' experiences, who had career transitioned, was that I was wholly unprepared for what was to come, and I may now consider myself lucky to have a second

career that saw me through the bulk of my working life. I now better understand that it was not *if*, but *when*, the ballet career comes to an end for everyone, myself included, and it is something that we all have to come to terms with sooner or later. The lack of preparation afflicted us all.

While I wish that I had not missed out on the enjoyable physicality and embodied emotions associated with being a ballet dancer, I am now more aware of what life outside of ballet has given me and that I may not have had these wider experiences if I had a fuller ballet career.

Reflecting on my ballet injury, I too acknowledge that I was, to some extent, complicit in treating my body in similar ways to that of my participants, thinking that pushing your body to the limit was the one and only way of making progress and catching the eye of ballet management. I did not think I was doing anything wrong or untoward to my body at the time. Equally, technology has moved on and prevention and rehabilitation of injuries are receiving a lot more attention than ever before, and that is bittersweet for me to see. More needs to be done in this respect.

With regards to the future, this is one consideration that is difficult to support with theoretical underpinning. Forecasting my emotive reaction when this study is concluded and is no longer a major part of my daily life is difficult to comprehend. Not only would I be departing the process of reading and researching but I will also, for a second time, be distancing myself to some extent from the ballet world. Still in the thick of it, my sense right now is that I would welcome the successful conclusion of this long-term project. Certainly, the daily grind of drafting and re-drafting paragraphs and chapters will come to a welcome end. Having said that, I must anticipate that I will likely experience a sense of loss and mourning.

At this stage, part of me is grappling with thinking about the uncertainty that will follow the completion of this thesis. Having had the thesis in my life over the last 7 years, it will be tantamount to bidding *adieu* to an old friend. All friends bring joy, some on arrival others on departure. Although, on reflection, I do not generally spend this breadth and depth of time with friends but this has been a long-standing relationship that was there through significant life events. Will this feel like a *phantom limb* when it is gone? I may no longer be able to see or touch it anymore, but it will be keenly felt no matter what.

With hindsight, there are many things along the way that I could have done differently, but to single out one key issue that I underestimated was the extent of the emotional impact of me re-engaging with the ballet world so closely. Having professional support enabled me to re-balance the relationship with the occupation and enabled me to focus on the requirements of my study. Something that continues to be a challenge

for me is to write more succinctly in English. With the influences of my native tongue, Spanish, it remains an ongoing challenge for me to adopt a more succinct approach to my writing style. Also with hindsight, I would have ensured that I undertook doctoral studies without the pressure of a City job.

What I have learned from my doctoral journey is that dancing a full-length four act ballet presented relatively fewer challenges than the thesis to arrive at completion. Perfectionistic tendencies though were an ever present demon that plagued both my ballet career and my doctoral studies and remains a challenge.

The question though, is *what follows*? Ideally speaking, I would like to continue active engagement with the ballet world from an academic perspective where I could possibly continue giving voice to an otherwise silent world. Maintaining an open mind and considering opportunities is my watchword. I have career transitioned before, and this presents another opportunity for me to grow.

8.4.4 Impact and Importance to Stakeholders

The most impactful aspect of my study is the identification of the tensions between the idealised-body, the object-body, and the subject-body. My study highlighted the need for greater attention to be paid to the phenomenological lived body and hence the experience of the individual, epitomised by the subject-body in OS. This subjective experience may or may not be congruent with social interaction exhibited by the individual via the object body. This has implications for health and well-being of the individual, outcomes at work, and their occupational identity.

Recognising each dancer as an individual and taking an individualised approach to their management, is desirable but is something that will require significant cultural change in the occupation. Such a change will require high levels of psychological safety but, in the current context, may threaten the hierarchical nature of the prevailing culture which will be difficult to challenge. Some ballet companies have made a start.

Whilst I am cognisant that my study is comprised of a small sample, there is a paucity of studies in OS that focuses on active professional ballet dancers and informs ballet as employment. My study contributes knowledge to that aspect, and about the lived experience of the individual dancers in relation to the occupation. This can inform larger quantitative and/or qualitative studies which could bring about more reliable generalisability. My study also raises awareness of the lived experience of the tensions between the aspirational idealised body, the socially visible body (object-body), and the phenomenologically lived body as experienced by each individual.

In particular, my study highlights the tension between the socially constructed aspirational body, the joy of dancing, and the mechanisms related to passion and calling. My study provides particular insights into the nature of the co-existing light/dark tensions inherent in passion, and the shape of the sacrifices that dancers endure. Greater understanding of these tensions could inform management practice to better accommodate nuances and, thereby, creating a more favourable working environment for all in the organisation.

My study also contributes to the body of knowledge in OS in relation to age as an embodied identity (Thomas, et al., 2014). In particular, it contributes in relation to the operationalisation of *functional age* as part of alternative conceptualisations of age that should be a consideration in the workplace. This is contrary to the corporate norm in mainline employment where chronological age is the singular norm (De Lange, et al., 2021). Functional age plays a pivotal role at work because it assesses the individual's functional capability to do a given role (Kooij, et al., 2008; De Lange, et al.,2021).

Despite female and male roles being specifically defined in classical ballet, my study corroborates a valuable finding (Markula, 2015) in that, with minimal exceptions (e.g.: location of injuries), both male and female participants expressed similar lived experiences and gender (sex) differences appeared to have little or no material relevance in relation to their lived experience of their occupational identity and ageing.

This thesis confirms the necessity eloquently addressed in multiple studies (e.g.: Mainwaring, Krasnow and Kerr, 2001; Aalten, 2005; Zeller, 2017; Vassallo, et al., 2019; Australian Ballet, 2020; Bolling, et al., 2021) for cultural change, and the need for greater clarity and openness in relation to pain, injury, wear-and-tear. My study highlights the added dimension of the impact on the emotional experiences lived by ballet dancers in respect of these aspects. Further, my study identified that dancers incurred wear and tear and injuries to their bodies that they did not consider to be a sacrifice despite the long-term implications for their health, wellbeing and identity.

8.5 Contributions

My study makes five contributions to the study of embodied occupational identity and age(ing) in OS. They are comprised of two theoretical, one empirical, two methodological, and a reflexive offering in line with IPA and qualitative research.

My first contribution is to the emergent research in OS exploring the body/identity nexus (Knights and Clarke, 2017; Courpasson and Monties, 2017; Lawrence, et al., 2022). In so doing, I highlight the less visited role of the individually lived subject body as an inextricable component of identity (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). The inclusion of the

subject body complements the lived experience dimension alongside the discursively constructed idealised body, and the materially operationalised object body. Operationalising these three integrated notions of the body, highlights the tensions that inform my participants' lived experience of their occupational identity.

My second contribution furthers theoretical understanding of age(ing) as a lifelong accumulation process of skills and experiences, rather than treating it as an event occurring towards the nexus of retirement. I argue that age(ing) is an ongoing, continuous process with temporal phases that should not be perceived as a "break with the past" (Cutcher and Riach, 2014, p. 772). In the process of organising work, age should feature throughout the lifecycle of a career (Cutcher, Riach and Tyler, 2022).

Empirically, my study contributes to the conversation of age(ing) at work, positioning it as a multi-layered complex phenomenon. Age(ing) is a material marker informing embodied identity and encompassing the accumulation of physical and psychological experiences. These are influenced by institutional norms and transcendental events in the process of organising work (Riach and Cutcher, 2014). My study supports the argument for the undoing of linear chrononormativity as the principal mechanism for organising (Riach, Rumens and Tyler, 2014) and, instead, makes the case for the deployment of alternative conceptualisations of age.

Methodologically, my study makes a contribution to a less visited approach in OS by deploying IPA. I make the case for a first-person, in-depth, study of individual nuances instead of aggregation and averaging. This approach generated insights based on individual case studies that would otherwise no likely be accessible (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Whilst not generalisable, these findings could inform larger follow on studies.

The incorporation of participant-led photography in an IPA study is not new but, in the process of engagement with the participants, this additional voluntary step during preparation enhanced engagement and the sense-making process during the interview dialogue (Kings, Knight and Moulding, 2020). It also provided a pre-reflexive opportunity for the participant to exercise agency whether or not they chose to bring actual photos to the interviews.

Whilst researcher's reflexivity is a process enshrined in IPA, the consolidated presentation of my experiences in a single chapter represents an enhanced approach. It brings the reader into the space between the researcher and the researched, thereby informing the context and influences under which I carried out the research. My self-reflexive approach is somewhat transformative in the field of OS in that I take a direct and explicit, rather than a distributed or 'tokenistic' approach (Gilmore and Kenny, 2015).

8.6 Implications for Future Research

Adding to the burgeoning stream of research addressing the body/identity nexus in OS (e.g.: Courpasson and Monties, 2017; van Amsterdam and van Eck, 2019; Sergeeva, Faraj and Hyusman, 2020; Elidrissi and Courpasson, 2021; Jammaers and Zanoni, 2021; Pouthier and Sondak, 2021; Jammaers and Ybema, 2022; Lawrence, et al., 2022) my study supports the case for the specific inclusion of the subject body as a primary protagonist for organising at work (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962). The inclusion of the subject body provides for the co-constitution of the symbolic, the material, and experiential notions of the body producing a more comprehensive account (Simpson and Simpson, 2018). In particular, it provides for the inclusion of the intangible, emotive experiential elements augmenting understanding of how occupational identity is lived. This may require a shift in the focus in OS towards a more phenomenologically oriented approach with its concomitant critical realist ontology and more encompassing epistemological positioning (Fletcher, 2017).

Further contributions could be made to the study of fear in the workplace. My participants made frequent reference to this topic in their relationship with teachers, and with management. Given the paucity of research on fear in relation to ballet dancers (Moola and Krahn, 2018), there is scope for further study in this regard and its impact on the psychological safety within the balletic working environment.

Another direction for future research could be to explore the role of general intelligence as a criterion in becoming a successful ballet dancer as suggested by some of my participants. Adjacent performing artforms have been addressed in this regard (Jankovic and Bogaerts, 2020) but ballet dancers, as a specific and unique population, have as yet not been considered.

Age(ing) remains a confused, controversial and under-researched area in OS. Empirical engagement with alternative conceptualisations of age(ing), of all ages at work. On this note, research involving embodied identity and age(ing) at work could be better served where a longitudinal approach that would facilitate deeper understanding of the temporal nature and changes occurring over time.

8.7 Recommendations for Future Practice

Whilst discipline and values are essential in the preparation and training of ballet dancers, management based on tyranny and fear needs to be addressed more actively in the industry. This applies throughout the extended employment lifecycle including

pedagogy, retention, development and career-transitioning. While some progress has been made, my study shows that authoritarian management processes remain embedded in the occupation and require further consideration.

An organisation that has undergone significant cultural change in recent times, is The Australian Ballet in Melbourne, where they focused on changes to injury reporting behaviour. Their intervention resulted a multi-disciplinary Injury Risk Management Programme being deployed (Australian Ballet, 2020). Further understanding of the individual dancers lived experience of those changes requires further study (Harrison and Ruddock-Hudson, 2017; Vassallo, et al., 2019).

Recruitment and selection into the occupation should be carried out on the grounds of the wider balanced 'package' as argued by my participants. This is where candidates are assessed more holistically for those intangible attributes (e.g.: artistry, musicality, and intellect) in addition to well-proportioned but more diverse healthy body shapes. This is bound to promote greater welfare for the dancers, as well as the potential for greater career longevity that will benefit both the individual and the organisation.

A mechanism needs to be established to enable individuals to find a better balance between their object-body (the body that the dancers work *on*, *through* and *with*) and the idealised balletic aesthetic in order to overcome the significant impact of negative body image that prevails in the occupation. The previously mentioned 'balanced package' recommendation may, in part, provide some respite but pedagogic and daily discipline methods need to be adapted to inculcate a greater sense of satisfaction and appreciation of the individual for their body and its contribution to the craft.

There is a case to be made for radical cultural reform (undoing of the linear chrononormative approach to organising at work) to be undertaken within the occupation (Cutcher, Riach and Tyler, 2022). This reform should address the perennial culture of injury under-reporting; integrated workload scheduling (particularly allowing for adequate post-performance recovery time); the implications for mixed genre programming (classical and contemporary); dancers' peak load management; and ballet dancers' overall wellbeing.

While the industry does appear to, broadly, operationalise ageing on an individualised basis, closer attention by the organisation to the individual is required. The organisation should pay attention to the specific interventions and needs of each individual. From my research, it would appear that too many self-driven interventions are deployed. These may not be fully optimised to maximise the benefit to the dancer, and to the company. The complexities of age(ing) in relation to the short and embodied career need to be better recognised and made more transparent.

Mainstream employment may benefit from adopting a broader approach to how age(ing) at work is conceptualised. Specifically, they could benefit from the ballet world where age is operationalised based a broader set of conceptualisations beyond chronological age.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval Form

The Ethics Form

Organizational Psychology, BIRKBECK, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

PROPOSAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

SUBMISSION TO SCHOOL ETHICS COMMITTEE

Please type or write clearly in BLACK ink

Name of investigator:	Paula Fitzgerald
Status (e.g. PhD student, postgraduate)	MPhil/PhD student
Name of supervisor (if known)	Dr Katrina Pritchard
Course/Programme:	MPhil/PhD Organisational Psychology
Title of investigation (15 words maximum):	"Turning Pointe: An exploration of identity and career development amongst professional ballet dancers"
Contact address for investigator	Flat 3, 179, Broomwood Road , LONDON SW11 6JX
Telephone number: 0207 738 2964	**Mobile** 07768 825 799
Email:	pfitzgerald65@hotmail.co.uk
Date of Application: 20 April 2015	**Proposed starting date**: 1 May 2015
Source of funding if relevant:	PhD Studentship – Dept. of Organisational Psychology

Is any other Ethical Committee involved: ~~**YES**~~**/NO**

If YES, give details of committee and its decision:

Brief description of aims/objectives of the study

To investigate how professional ballet dancers construct and negotiate their professional identities and experience the process of age at work (beyond the paradigm of chronological age). A particular focus will be given to the role of identity and the body (the latter as the instrument in their profession, and as a factor in their identity formulation). The research will endeavour to investigate individual identities and their influence in the relationship dynamics between younger and older workers. In a time sensitive career such as professional ballet, where physical proficiency combined with artistic and depth of interpretation are necessary elements, issues surrounding the interrelationship between identity shaping and age are likely to be magnified.

This study aims to generate knowledge primarily for an academic audience, but also for the possible benefit of organisations, practitioners, and the wider stakeholder body.

How will participants be selected? Will the selection process have implication in terms of data protection etc?
Participants will be selected on the basis of purposive sampling techniques. I do not foresee implications in terms of data protection.

Where will the study be conducted?
In the UK generally, but likely to be centred in London.

Briefly describe what participating in the study will involve:
Participants will be required to respond to individual and/or group interviews as well as being observed during company classes, rehearsals and performances. Respondents may be invited to participate through the medium of participant-led photographic images that may be used during the research process.

Does the study involve the deliberate use of:

(i) Unpleasant stimuli or unpleasant situations?	(~~YES~~/NO)
(ii) Invasive procedures?	(~~YES~~/NO)
(iii) Deprivation or restriction (e.g., food, water, sleep)?	(~~YES~~/NO)
(iv) Drug administration?	(~~YES~~/NO)
(v) Actively misleading or deceiving the subjects?	(~~YES~~/NO)
(vi) Withholding information about the nature or outcome of the experiment?	(~~YES~~/NO)
(vii) Any inducement or payment to take part in the experiment	(~~YES~~/NO)

Does the study have any procedure that might cause distress to the subject? (~~YES~~/NO)

Give details of any item marked YES: **N/A**

What arrangements are to be made to obtain the free and informed consent of the subjects?›
Consent form attached.

How will you maintain the participants' confidentiality?

All responses will be anonymised in the research project document. All interviews, recordings, etc. will be saved in a firewall-protected personal computer, and where possible, access passwords will be applied.

Will the subjects be minors or suffer from learning disabilities? (~~YES~~/NO)
If yes, outline how you will address the ethical issues raised.

If you feel that the proposed investigation raises ethical issues please outline them below:
Not applicable

Will the research involve any conflict between your role at work and your role as a research student? (i.e. will you want to use data/colleagues that you have access/contact with in your job but as a researcher this data/colleagues would not normally be available to you)

No.

Classification of proposal (please underline) **<u>ROUTINE</u>** **~~NON-ROUTINE~~**

When you are ready to start data collection you and your supervisor should check the ethics form has been satisfactorily completed before signing the form and sending a copy to Philip Dewe.

I consider that my study conforms with the ethical expectations of management and psychological research

SIGNATURE of investigator **and supervisor**

Date: 20 April 2015

You should complete this form and submit it via the appropriate portal in the Research Methods and Project area on the BLE when you submit your Research Proposal.

When you are ready to collect your data, you should check the form with your supervisor and send a signed copy of the form to George Michaelides, Chair of the Ethics Committee. If, at this point, your research plans and the ethics form have been revised since you first submitted it, you should submit a revised copy via the same portal on the BLE.

Appendix B: Research Project Information Sheet

School of Business, Economics and Informatics
Department of Organisational Psychology

Research Project - Information Sheet

Turning Pointe: An Exploration of Identity Construction and Career Development of Professional Ballet Dancers.

Background
This study is being conducted by Paula Fitzgerald, PhD student, in the Department of Organizational Psychology, Birkbeck, University of London.

Purpose of the research project
The purpose of this research is to explore how professional ballet dancers perceive themselves in their professional roles, and how career dynamics influence changes in their perceptions over time.

Stated more formally, the research project will endeavour to investigate how professional ballet dancers construct their individual professional identities in the context of a ballet company environment and the influences of career development over time. Aspects of the research will include: an investigation into the role of the physical body (as an instrument in the professional context), career development stages, age dynamics, and transitioning.

The project seeks to appreciate the influences, pressures, and processes that have an impact on the professional ballet dancers' career in order to provide opportunities for understanding and enhancement of their experience.

Format
The project is expected to take the form of a series of interviews (individual and group), and observations with ballet dancers in a range of scenarios within the professional realm of their daily activities. In this process of this research respondent-led photographic images may also be used as a form of data collection.

Interviews
Interviews may be carried out individually or in groups. Individual interviews will take approximately 60 minutes, and can be conducted either at the interviewee's place of work, or at the university campus whichever is more convenient for the interviewee. Group interviews will most likely be carried out at the venues were dancers are professionally engaged.

The interviewee(s) will be informed prior to the commencement of the process that they will be asked a series of questions. They will be informed that they are not obliged to answer all or any of the questions and they will also be advised that they are liberty, at any time during the process to withdraw from

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the study. In the event that an interviewee does withdraw all of the data collected will be excluded from the research output.

Observations
Observations will take place within the professional realm of the ballet dancers' activities (i.e.: studios, rehearsals, performances, etc.) Permission will be sought from senior management and/or supervisory staff members and a written record will be maintained. For the avoidance of doubt, the only data collection from the observations will be the researcher's notes and respondent-led photographic images.

Individuals present at the observation(s) will be briefed on the overall project's details. However, as the researcher does not intend to collect individual information about the participants they will not be required to give informed consent.

The researcher recognises that respondent-led photographic images may be captured using a variety of devices including cameras, mobile phones, tablets, etc. and a degree of flexibility will have to be deployed in the process of collecting and assembling this data. For example, uploads to services such as Dropbox, Google Drive, etc. or sharing via Bluetooth or Wi-Fi may be deployed. In other instances, social media sites may be preferred. All receipts will be acknowledged wherever possible by electronic means including email, SMS, social media sites, or by post. The receipt will contain a statement explaining that the images will be utilised in the process of academic research and will provide an opportunity for the respondent to withdraw the images within a reasonable timescale.

Consent
At the time of the interview, the interviewee will be asked to sign a consent form that outlines more about their rights during the research and guarantees confidentiality of their information.

Interview Recording
The interview will be recorded for later transcription by myself or, if need be, by a professional confidential transcriber previously deployed by the researcher. The researcher will record the interview so as to capture what is said in the interview without being distracted by the need to take notes. However, the interviewee can ask not to have their interview recorded, or request that the recording device be stopped at any time during the interview. The transcribed interview will be kept for 12 months after the completion of the project in a secure place and then securely destroyed.

Support

The Dancers' Career Development (DCD) exists to support all professional dancers in the UK to navigate a positive career transition. DCD support all professional dancers in the UK, at any stage of their career, through a bold programme of Transition Support Services. This includes the opportunity to talk openly about your thoughts and plans in a strictly non-judgmental,

confidential and safe space. Please contact Jennifer Curry, Executive Director on 020 7831 1449 or via email: jennifer@thedcd.org.uk for more information. www.thedcd.org.uk

Confidentiality

Once all interviews have been conducted, common themes will be identified and summarised by the researcher in an anonymised form.

No information that could identify an individual will be used without permission. Academic publications, based on data collected, will be devised. However, these publications will also be anonymised, both as to individual participants and the company involved unless otherwise agreed in writing.

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

School of Business, Economics and Informatics
Department of Organizational Psychology

Participant Consent Form

Research Project

Turning Pointe: An Exploration of Identity Construction and Career Development of Professional Ballet Dancers.

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular questions.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission (*The information will be used only for this research and publications arising from this research project.*)

I agree/do not agree to the interview being recorded.

I understand that I have the right to ask for the recording device to be turned off at any time during the interview.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed…………………….. Name……………………….. Date……………..

Appendix D: Research Project – Debriefing Information

School of Business, Economics and Informatics
Department of Organizational Psychology

Research Project – Debriefing Information Sheet

(Delivered verbally after interview)

Thank you for taking part in my study.

Ballet has characteristically been studied at student, and career (or post-) transitioning phases. It has also provided the backdrop for a number of dance research and healthcare (e.g.: eating disorders, body image, orthopaedics) studies. Ballet, however, has been overlooked as work and this is what my study addresses from an individual perspective (rather than the organisation).

If after the interviews, you feel the need to discuss anything related to what you have shared with me, you can contact DCD (Dancers Career Development) as set out in the research project information sheet (see below):

The Dancers' Career Development (DCD) exists to support all professional dancers in the UK to navigate a positive career transition. DCD support all professional dancers in the UK, at any stage of their career, through a bold programme of Transition Support Services. This includes the opportunity to talk openly about your thoughts and plans in a strictly non-judgmental, confidential and safe space. Please contact Jennifer Curry, Executive Director on 020 7831 1449 or via email: jennifer@thedcd.org.uk for more information. www.thedcd.org.uk

I would like to thank you once again for your time and kind cooperation.

Thank you.

Paula

Appendix E: Research Project – Interview Schedule Guide

School of Business, Economics and Informatics
Department of Organisational Psychology

Research Project – Sample Introductory Questions

Re: Turning Pointe: An Exploration of Identity and Career Development Amongst Professional Ballet Dancers.

Warm up

- Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself?
- How did your ballet journey start?

Your Working Day

- What does a typical day for you look like?
- What did a typical day for you looked like (if now different)?

Body

The body in ballet is determined by its successes (i.e.: technique, artistry, body shape, looks, or size, etc.) but also by its limitations.

- The passing of time is inevitable for all of us but in a short performing career such as ballet this may be lived more acutely. What are your thoughts about this?
- A lot of emphasis is placed on the aesthetics necessary to produce purity of balletic line (e.g.: turn out, flexibility, natural elevation, etc.) In your opinion, what is the 'right' body for ballet? Is there such a body?
- Injuries are a high-risk part of the career of any elite athlete or ballet dancer. Would you like to share with me any experiences that you may have had?
    - (if injured) What happened during that in-between time?
        - How did you feel about not being able to train/dance?
        - How did you feel upon your return?

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Outlook

- What does ballet mean to you?
- Ballet is a short career and a very competitive field. What is your opinion on this?
- Ballet is a career that requires full dedication, discipline, and focus. How do you feel about that?
- What time do you commit to other interests?
- To what extent is ballet included in your future planning?

Photos

- Time to discuss the photo(s) brought in by the participant

Epilogue

- (if dancing) – if you were to introduce yourself to a stranger, who would you say you are?
- (if already career transitioned) – If you were to introduce yourself to someone who did not know you, who would you say that you are?

Glossary

Apprentice:	In more recent times, an 'apprentice' rank has been created in some (usually larger) professional ballet companies. Apprentices provide support/cover for 'corps de ballet' members whilst gaining valuable onstage experience. Apprentices rank above pre-professional ballet students.
Ballet master/mistress:	Generally, ballet dancers (active or transitioned) that have responsibility for teaching and rehearsing dancers in a company. In larger companies there may be several ballet masters/mistresses allocated to different ranks (i.e.: corps de ballet, soloists, and principals). They have specific or in-depth knowledge of the company's, or a specific choreographer's, repertoire. They may reach daily class, supervise rehearsals, etc. They work from memory (i.e.: having performed/rehearsed the roles themselves, or with a choreologist (a specialist in dance notation) to rehearse forthcoming repertoire. See also 'Répétiteur.
Barre:	Literally, a wooden 'handrail' of (roughly) waist height screwed onto the studio walls, or portable metallic standalone devices secured by heavy weights at the bottom. The barre provides support to dancers whilst they do warm up routines and execute training exercises during daily class. 'Barre' can also be used colloquially to denote the initial part of the daily ballet class, usually the first 45 minutes, where dancers carry out their warm-up and exercises involving body balance, control, strength, speed, etc. whilst supported by a wooden 'handrail'.
Call sheets:	Released on a weekly basis, these A4 sheets of paper pinned side-by-side on large boards are one of the main regular communication tools between company management and the dancers. Some of these have now been replaced by electronic notice boards. These rehearsal and casting sheets crystalise the company director's, and ballet staff, choices in terms of *who does what?* in the company (usually 4-5 casts, and their 'corps the ballet' understudies are announced in these sheets at any one time). As such, these sheets manage every move of ballet dancers (from 'corps de ballet' to 'principals') in a company. In other words, they display within the

	confines of the ballet company who is doing what in the various rehearsals and future performances. As always, these sheets, and the names featured on them, are subject to sudden change given dancers' injuries, illnesses and so on. In some cases, new joiners to the company and promotions within the ranks may also be announced this way.
Character Dancers:	Usually, senior members of a ballet company performing predominantly acting roles. However, these dancers can also perform roles requiring greater dancing ability in Spanish, Hungarian, Russian, or other folk-oriented dances. Some larger companies may split this category into 'Principal Character Dancers, and Character Dancers' to denote the dancers' specialisation and seniority within the company).
Class:	For dancers, this is comparable to someone's breathing (Bull, 2011). An embodied and natural part of a dancer's life. A daily ballet class marks the beginning of the everyday in a professional dancer's life. Usually lasting approximately 1:15hrs (1:30hrs as a student) it comprises of a series of exercises that start at the *barre* with a series of warm up combinations (gradually increasing in demand, speed and complexity of them). Class ends with combination of steps executed in the centre of the studio. In the UK, generally, professional dancers take their daily classes as a group activity (all ranks together). Having said that, some larger foreign companies may split daily classes according to rank in the company (principals; and then a different but parallel class for soloists and artists).
Corps de Ballet/Artist:	This is usually the entry-level rank in a professional ballet company.
Coryphée:	A rank that has almost disappeared from use in UK ballet companies. Usually applied to an experienced (male/female) member of the corps de ballet in a ballet company (most UK companies have re-named the rank as "first artist". A 'coryphée', or 'first artist', ranks below 'soloists'.
Doxa	Bourdieu used this term to describe the beliefs of an individual as "a quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and this

	subjective principles of the organisation [with which] the natural and social world appears as self-evident" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 156).
Embodied Occupation:	In the context of my study, I mean an occupation where the body is at the centre of the task, and through specific training, has been crafted for purpose.
Field:	Field' refers to social arenas (e.g.: work, home life, hobbies, sports) represented by groups of individuals whose bodies epitomise the characteristics (or brand) of the organisation (van Amsterdam, Claringbould and Knoppers, 2017).
Habitus:	Accumulation of historical interaction by the individual in society and through which capital (e.g.: social, economic, cultural skills and competencies) is sedimented into the body (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Holroyd, 2002)
Hexis	Body hexis is a form of body memory which is crystallized through practical interaction with the structure of the environmental surround (Throop and Murphy, 2002, p. 188).
Physical Capital:	The embodied state of cultural capital (Shilling, 1991). Physical capital can be seen to comprise those physical attributes and abilities such as strength and skill that are embodied through particular sporting and social practices, and that can be readily converted into other forms of capital (e.g., money, fame, status) (Holroyd, 2002).
Principal:	This is the highest dancer's rank within a ballet company. Principals (male/female) may be promoted from within the company's ranks or be hired externally. Some larger ballet companies may differentiate rank within this level (i.e.: 'Principals' and 'Senior/Lead Principals'; and 'Danseur Etoiles' & 'Prima Ballerina Assoluta' are the highest principal ranks at non-English speaking language companies such as the Paris Opera Ballet and Alla Scala de Milan Ballet).

Répétiteur:	At times and in some companies, this term may be used interchangeably with 'ballet master/mistress'. A person who rehearses dancers (a coach). Usually, a former dancer that knows specific role(s) in various ballets and has developed the skill to explain the necessary choreography to a newcomer or is happy to undertake backstage rehearsal with more experienced dancers. They may work from memory (i.e.: having performed/rehearsed the roles themselves or with a choreologist (a specialist in dance notation). In larger companies, there will be several répétiteurs and assistant répétiteurs: coaching the corps de ballet, soloists, and principals.
Soloist:	A member of a ballet company (male or female) that is usually a step away from becoming a 'principal' (the top job). Practically, a soloist is a dancer sits between a 'principal' and a 'corps de ballet' dancer. They may rehearse, and be called to perform, 'solo' and 'group' roles where required. Some larger ballet companies have the soloist category split into 'soloists' or 'second soloists' and 'first soloists' to denote higher ranking within the level. Clearly, the higher the rank, the closer to 'principal' roles the dancers get to rehearse and perform.
Studio:	These are the spaces where dancers do class, practice and rehearse. Studios designed specifically for ballet purposes are different from other dance studios in that they usually rather large rooms where the flooring has been constructed in such manner (sprung) that can absorb the impact of the dancers' jumps. In addition, during the past 25 years, the use of rosin has been replaced by the use a special vinyl floor covering (grey or black) that covers the studio floor (or stage) but this is not glued to it. Ballet studios also feature a *barre* at (roughly) waist height that can either be attached to the wall or be stand-alone portable and secured by heavy weights at the bottom. It is usually common that studios will have wall-to-wall mirrors that are used by the dancers to check their body alignment. There will also be a large curtain to cover the whole mirror once the movements and alignments have been 'embodied' and understood by the dancers, so as not to create 'dependency' between the

	dancers and the mirror (on stage the dancers will not have a mirror to check themselves upon!). There is usually a piano to accompany studio classes and rehearsals, and some other form of sound system.