

Former Elite Adolescent Female Dancers Reflect on the Loss of a Professional Dream

A Thesis Submitted to the
College of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Masters of Education
in the Department of Educational Psychology
and Special Education
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, SK

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ABSTRACT

Preparing for a professional ballet dance career requires dedication, discipline and single-minded focus. But, as training becomes increasingly competitive, many dancers must give up this aspiration and reinvent themselves for a life after dance. The transition is challenged by identity loss and limited consideration of alternative careers. Although researchers have studied the transition to a post-dance life for professional ballet dancers, the transition of younger dancers remains unstudied. The goal of this research was to analyze stories of what it means to be an elite, female dancer who was unable to achieve a professional dancing career, and had to make another life for herself. A qualitative study was conducted. Five women, who were former elite amateur ballet dancers, were asked to share their stories through three separate semi-structured interviews. Participants also shared personally meaningful objects. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis and represented in the context of individual stories. A common overarching framework was identified that included: discovering the dream, living the dream, losing the dream, and life after the dream. Further thematic analysis generated insight about the culture of ballet (e.g., rites of passage, individual dancer characteristics, peer relations), as well as common challenges, facilitators and meaning making associated with negotiating a new work/life after failing to become a professional dancer. Findings contribute to the existing literature and suggest the appropriateness of conceptualizing the experience as one of loss and mourning (Worden, 2009). Implications for future research as well as for adults involved in the world of elite dancing (e.g., ballet teachers, school teachers and counsellors) are discussed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take the time and thank the many people who helped make this project, *Former Elite Adolescent Female Dancers Reflect on the Loss of a Professional Dream*, possible. First, I would like to thank my participants for telling me their stories about giving up their dreams of becoming ballerinas and making another kind of life for themselves. I truly enjoyed listening and immersing myself with these stories. Also, I would like to thank each of them as they taught me that although we did not attain our dreams to dance professionally, dance can still be an important part of our lives.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Jennifer Nicol for your patience and guidance, and most importantly for helping me realize that my research should be in an area that I am truly passionate about. Thank you to my committee member, Dr. Brenda Kalyn, for sharing both your research expertise and personal experience with the phenomena under study. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Debbie Pushor who as my external examiner provided her support and research expertise. Finally, I would like to thank each of you along with Dr. Tim Claypool (thesis defense chair) for providing your support and kind words as I voiced my plan of pursuing a Post-doctoral degree.

I would like to thank my many dance teachers that I have throughout the pursued of my first dream, becoming a professional ballerina, for sharing with me their love of dance. I also would like to thank Joan Collins, who shared with me her love of psychology and supported me as I made the decision to pursue my second dream of becoming a psychologist.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. To my parents, Richard and Sharon Sandham, I am truly appreciated that you noticed my love of dance at an early age and gave me the

opportunity to pursue my dream. I also want to thank you for being patient with me as I struggled to navigate my journey to making another kind of life after my dream was not attained. I know it was not easy for you as you both just wanted me to be happy. Finally, I want to thank you for your support in my education endeavors, past, present and future. To my husband, Ken Wilson, I realize that you had to wear many hats during this process (husband, former grad student and university professor) and at times it was not fair, but words cannot express how thankful I am for all the support you have given me and I know will continue to give me, as I pursue my next endeavor.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The inspiration for the present study stems from my own experience of transitioning to a life after dance. For as long as I can remember, I wanted to be a ballerina. As soon as I was able to walk, I was dancing around the house. When I turned four, my mother enrolled me in my first dance class. With each passing year, I took more classes and along with my love for ballet, grew a passion to become a ballerina. Through the years I danced numerous roles in the Alberta Ballet's performance of *The Nutcracker*, competed in various dance competitions, completed most of my ballet exams, attended the Alberta Ballet Summer School, auditioned for both The National Ballet and Royal Winnipeg Summer Schools; but, was not accepted. At 14 years of age, I spent three weeks dancing in Russia.

This intense preoccupation with ballet did not allow me the time or the interest to explore other possible career paths, and therefore, I did not have a backup plan if my dream of becoming a ballerina did not come true. When I was 15 years old, I was accepted to the Royal Winnipeg Ballet Summer School. For five weeks I got a glimpse of what being a professional ballet dancer would be like and I loved every minute of it. However, this experience was a turning point in my life as I started to realize that my dream of becoming a ballerina might not be attainable. I was not a strong enough dancer to attend the ballet school year round. However, I was in denial and still lived my life as if I was going to become a ballerina.

It was not until I was 18 years old and graduating from high school that I fully realized and accepted that I would not attain my dream of becoming a ballerina. I was unsure about what to do next and struggled for a few years. I felt that I had lost my identity as well as the direction in my life. During these years I held a number of different jobs, none of which were fulfilling;

rather, they merely served as a means to survive. It was not until I was 24 years old and I took my first psychology class that I found a new niche in life.

I am now doing my Master's degree in an area that I feel very passionate about. There is not a day that goes by in which I do not think about ballet, and I still catch myself dancing around my house. However, I feel very fortunate that I am in a field in which I can conduct research on dance and dancers, because dancing played such a central role in my life. My hope with this research is that I can learn from the experiences of women who, like me, had a dream of becoming a ballerina that was not attained. I want to learn how these women coped with not achieving their dream and how they moved on to an alternative career. I hope that what I learn from these women's experiences can help others in similar positions by bringing the issues faced by this population into the foreground and facilitate the development of supports to ease the transition process.

The Present Study

The career path of professional female ballet dancers is well documented (Baumol, Jeffri & Throsby, 2004; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006; Roncaglia, 2006). Many professional ballet dancers enter the world of dance before they reach the age of eight (Pulinkala, 2011; Wainwright & Turner, 2004) and then participate in dance training that is intensive, requires dedication and discipline, and leaves little room for exploration of other occupations. When these ballet dancers become members of professional companies, they may focus exclusively on the enhancement of their professional careers to the detriment of other areas (e.g., personal development) (Pulinkala, 2011; Roncaglia, 2006). Professional dance careers are intensive in nature, and short in duration, with many dancers retiring before they reach the age of forty (Jeffri & Throsby, 2006; Pulinkala,

2011). When these professional dancers near the end of their career, they are faced with career transitions, which can result in economic, psychological and educational problems that affect the rest of their lives (Baumol, Jeffri & Throsby, 2004; Greben, 1992; Pickman, 1987).

Researchers have studied the transition of professional dancers to a post-dance life (Baumol, Jeffri & Throsby, 2004; Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006; Roncaglia, 2006, 2008, 2010); however, the transition of younger dancers remains unstudied. I was interested in understanding the experiences of young women who are unable to dance professionally despite years of training and planning. In particular, I wondered about “what is it like to be an elite female dancer who is unable to achieve a professional ballet dancing career and must make another kind of life for herself? How do these women negotiate this unique career transition? How can counsellors, family members and the dance community better support dancers experiencing this transition to a life after dance?” Consequently, a qualitative study, informed by narrative inquiry, was conducted about the transition stories of young women who are unable to dance professionally, despite years of training and planning. Five women who experienced this phenomenon participated in multiple semi-structured interviews that were narrative in nature. Findings involved acquiring a detailed understanding about how particular women experienced this phenomenon, which contributes to the research literature, and may help other dancers, and informs adults involved in the world of elite dancing (e.g. parents, ballet instructors, school teachers and helping professionals).

Organization of Thesis

The thesis chapters following this introduction chapter include a discussion of the relevant literature available regarding the phenomenon under study (Chapter 2), an explanation

of the present research methodology (Chapter 3), the results of the study (Chapter 4) and a discussion of the results (Chapter 5). For ease of reading, the term “ballet dancer” is used throughout the document to refer to female ballet dancers.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

In this chapter the background material of the present study is introduced. The research literature on dance, the physical and psychological characteristics of ballet dancers, and the characteristics of professional ballet careers is described as well as career transitions of professional ballerinas, and the challenges and facilitators of this process. There is also a discussion of the literature regarding the population of elite amateur ballet dancers that did not make it to the professional level. However, there is a dearth of literature in this area. There are few studies specifically examining the transitions of professional dancers to second careers (Baumol, Jeffri & Throsby, 2004; Roncaglia, 2006, 2008, 2010), but no similar controlled studies exist for this phenomena within the elite amateur ballet dance population.

Dance

Dance can be defined as “a language whose words are movements of the body” (van Praagh & Brinson in Preston-Dunlop, 1995). In Canada, over a million adults have reported participating in some form of dance activity (Canada Council for the Arts, 2004), and the majority are female. In Canada, 85% of all professional dancers are female, compared to only 47% of the general labor force (Canada Council for the Arts, 2004). There are many forms of dance including tap, jazz, ethnic, ballroom, ballet and modern. The most popular form of dance however, is ballet (Hamilton, 1998). Ballet was developed approximately 300 years ago in the courts of Italy and France (Hamilton, 1998). This dance form is very technical and is highly dependent upon having a certain body type (Hamilton, 1998; Pickard & Bailey, 2009). One must have long legs, a short torso, arched feet, thin body, turnout and flexibility (Hamilton, 1998). Genetics play a major role in the development of the ballet body, but proper training also plays a

vital role (Hamilton, 1998). Thus, one cannot learn ballet by reading a book or watching a video; students need an excellent teacher who will train them properly for body development (Hamilton, 1998). This art form is very competitive, and it is very hard to succeed professionally without the ideal ballet body (Hamilton, 1998). Approximately 9 out of 10 dancers dream of dancing professionally, but only 32% will achieve this goal (Hamilton, 1998). The two largest Canadian ballet companies, the National Ballet of Canada and the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, have approximately 94 dancers between them including apprentices and principal character artists, of which 40 dancers are male and 54 are female. Although there may be a large number of ballet dancers aspiring to a professional career, there are very few positions available.

Ballet Dancers

Ballet dancers start training for their career in early childhood, many as early as 5 or 6 years of age (Pickman, 1987; Pulinkala, 2011; Wainwright & Turner, 2004). Some dancers are enrolled in their first ballet class on account of their parents, who notice them dancing around the house (Wulff, 1998). Stinson, Blumenfield-Jones and van Dyke (1990) conducted a qualitative study using phenomenological and hermeneutic inquiry to examine the experiences of student dancers not enrolled in professional dance programs. Three interviews and one class observation session were conducted with seven females ranging in age from 16 to 18 years of age with backgrounds in jazz, tap, ballet and modern all of whom had danced for at least five years. It was found that mothers were a common driving force behind these young dancers finding dance. Many of them said that they disliked dancing at first; but, somehow dance came to be an important part of their lives, although they are not sure how this came about. Others are enrolled on their own account, usually after being exposed to a ballet performance as a young child and then asking to be enrolled in a dance class (Pickard & Bailey, 2009; Wulff, 1998). Whatever the

reason for an interest in ballet, the process of acculturation to the world of ballet begins at an early age, strengthening students' commitment to the art of dancing (Lee, 1988), and beginning their vocational training (Wulff, 1998).

Ballet training is intensive (Pulinkala, 2011; Wainwright & Turner, 2004) and requires a great level of concentration and dedication (Pickard & Bailey, 2009; Pickman, 1987). Therefore, serious ballet students dedicate much of their non-school time (Alter, 1997; Pickman, 1987), strength and energy during their youth to dancing (Pickman, 1987) and preparing for a ballet career (Wainwright & Turner, 2004). These hopeful dancers attend daily ballet classes, which are highly competitive, as well as rehearsals and performances (Pulinkala, 2011; Wainwright & Turner, 2004). In addition to the physical component, ballet dancers also must have a passion for dancing (Wainwright & Turner, 2004). To reach the level of a professional ballet dancer, one needs talent, be hard working and have the drive to dance (Wainwright & Turner, 2004).

Dancers' busy schedule leaves little time for socializing outside the dance studio; thus, making non-dancing friends is difficult (Buckroyd, 2001; Hamilton, 1998). What little time they do have to dedicate to non-dancing friendships decreases as they advance in their training (Buckroyd, 2001; Hamilton, 1998). More hours being allocated to dance classes means less time is available for socializing (Buckroyd, 2001; Hamilton, 1998). Dancers may also have trouble making non-dance friends because they may be seen as different from the "other kids" (Buckroyd, 2001; Hamilton, 1998). Adolescence is a particularly hard time for developing friendships, but it is that much harder when one is seen as different from the status quo (Hamilton, 1998). Stinson et al. (1990) noted that student dancers found it difficult to have a normal life and be a dancer, and felt that many non-dancers did not understand them. Similarly, Hamilton (1998) reported that dancers may be teased about their turnout, wearing their hair in a

bun, and even about their busy dance schedule. As a result, many of the dancer's friends consist of other dancers (Hamilton, 1998). Dancers have lots in common including the drive to be the best (Hamilton, 1998; Stinson et al., 1990). This commonality can result in competition between friends, which may place strain on their relationships (Buckroyd, 2001; Hamilton, 1998). However, dancers have also described a bond that develops from commonalities leading to deep friendships (Stinson et al., 1990). Interestingly, Stinson et al., (1990) found that despite the negative connotations of feeling different, dancers felt that the differences made them feel special, as they had discipline and knowledge not acquired by non-dancers.

The time constraints that dancing requires also leaves little time for exploring other possible occupations (Pickman, 1987), with some individuals even going as far as rejecting other possibilities to performing (Stinson et al., 1990). Most serious ballet students cannot imagine not dancing and therefore the short career length and negative impacts on lifestyle go unconsidered (Lee, 1988). These girls are goal-directed from a very young age with regards to having a performing career; so much so that they have tunnel vision, and most everything that is not dance-related falls by the way-side (Geben, 2002).

Also, because of their intense involvement with dance, students tend to form their identity solely around dance (Pickman, 1987). As time passes, serious dance students can become exceedingly invested in the dancer identity (Hamilton, 1998). Therefore, by the time the dancer reaches adolescence, they have begun to form an occupational identity that merges both self-identity and occupational identity into one (Lee, 1988; Pickard & Bailey, 2009). Some of the young women interviewed by Stinson et al. (1990) revealed this concept clearly: "It is who I am. ... If I couldn't dance I think I would feel like there was a part of me that was just totally dead" (p. 16), "I just can't imagine my life without it" (p. 16), and finally "I can't imagine not

doing it. If something would happen and I couldn't do it I'd be a very bitter person probably" (p. 16).

As previously mentioned, the acculturation to the world of ballet begins at approximately 5 or 6 years of age when the dancers begin training (Lee, 1988). The culture of ballet expects a high level of discipline from its members due to the intensive nature of the art form (Wainwright & Turner, 2004). The culture also expects a high level of obedience from its members, as dancers are taught from an early age to be instructed, directed and corrected by their teacher (Greben, 2002). They learn to see individuals in positions of power, like their ballet teacher, as having something to teach them and as being assistance providers (Greben, 2002). The ballet culture also has a certain decorum that the dancers must learn, which involves a high level of politeness, such as thanking the teacher for the class and apologizing after making a mistake (Wulff, 1998).

Those students who are devoted to becoming professional ballerinas will work through the hard times, both physically and psychologically (Hamilton, 1998). A few of these devoted dancers will be accepted into professional dance schools, but many will not. Those who are lucky enough to attend a ballet school will already be heavily invested in the idea of becoming a professional dancer (Buckroyd, 2000). Every aspect of the young dancer's life will be affected by the idea of dancing professionally (Buckroyd, 2000). The intense nature of training increases as the student enters the vocational school (Buckroyd, 2000). The school provides an intensive training as an elite dancer in addition to providing an academic education (Buckroyd, 2000). This environment does not leave the dancers with much unstructured time or energy to have a life outside the school (Buckroyd, 2000). Therefore, the students may only meet other students

from the school leading to an even more limited social life compared to others their own age (Buckroyd, 2000, 2001).

The main purpose of a professional ballet school is to train dancers to perform in their respective professional ballet company after graduation (Wulff, 1998). Unfortunately, there are not enough spots in the company for every dancer who graduates from the ballet school (Buckroyd, 2001; Wulff, 1998). On average, there are only one or two spots for new dancers each year (Wulff, 1998). Some graduates may find jobs at other dance companies or in show business, such as on Broadway (Wulff, 1998). However, the majority of graduates from professional dance schools will not find paid work as professional dancers (Buckroyd, 2000, 2001). Therefore, in the dance world, time, effort, training, self-discipline and sacrifice does not always equal success (Hanna, 1988), and this can have devastating effects upon these young women.

Professional Ballet Careers

As mentioned, there may be many young dancers hoping to go onto a professional career, but very few will be accepted into a professional ballet company (Alter, 1997). Many of these dancers' professional careers begin with an audition to join the company (Wulff, 1998). The audition may take the shape of a class in which the hopeful dancers join with the established members of the company (Wulff, 1998). Another way into a ballet company is to be a paid student in the respective ballet school or an apprentice with the company. These dancers perform at various times throughout the year and may be offered a permanent contract with the ballet company (Wulff, 1998). Regardless of the way the new dancer comes to be a part of the ballet company, they will start at the bottom as members of the corps de ballet (Wulff, 1998).

The goal of any professional ballet dancer is to move through the ranks from the corps de ballet, to second soloist, to soloist and finally to principal dancer (Wulff, 1998).

For those ballet dancers who do make it to the professional level, their income is relatively low (Geben, 1999). For example, in Canada, dancers are among the poorest paid workers, falling among the bottom five percent of all occupations (Canada Council for the Arts, 2004). Thus, professional ballet dancers dance because it is their lifelong passion, not because of the financial rewards (Hanna, 1988; Sidimus, 1987).

The mental and physical hard work required to reach a professional level is also necessary to succeed once in a ballet company. Often ballet dancers have classes and rehearsals during the day followed by performances in the evening during the week (Wainwright & Turner, 2004; Wulff, 1998). On Saturdays, there often are rehearsals and performances, and on Sunday there may also be additional rehearsals for some dancers (Wainwright & Turner, 2004). Therefore, a typical work week for ballet dancers consists of long hours, six to seven days a week (Wainwright & Turner, 2004).

As mentioned previously, the intensity of a lifelong pursuit of a ballet career impacts dancers' social circles. Dancers have little time to make friendships outside of dance; therefore, the company often includes many of the dancers' friends (Geben, 1999). In fact, the company is very similar to a close-knit family, with the dancers representing siblings (Hamilton, 1998). Just as there may be competition among siblings, competition is a part of the dance world that cannot be avoided (Buckroyd, 2001; Hamilton, 1998). Dancers compete for roles, promotions and even being the thinnest dancer (Buckroyd, 2001; Hamilton, 1998). Despite this competition, there is noticeable camaraderie within a ballet company (Wulff, 1988). Dancers cheer on their

colleagues from the audience, wish each other luck before performances, exchange presents, and show support in both professionally and personally hard times (Wulff, 1998).

The intensive nature of ballet also has profound effects on one's intimate relationships. Non-dancers may find the life of a dancer hard to understand (Wulff, 1998). Thus, due to the intensity of the career, long working hours and time away from home touring, many ballet dancers look inside the company for significant others (Lee, 1988; Wulff, 1998). Although, some dancers get married (Gordon, 1983), most dancers put off marriage until they are finished with their performing career (Geben, 1985; Hamilton, 1998). Similarly, most ballet dancers wait to have children until they have retired (Gordon, 1983; Geben, 1985; Hamilton, 1998), as they fear that taking time off will hurt their career (Gordon, 1983).

Finally, ballet dancers' intense career leaves little time left over for exploring alternative careers (Gordon, 1983; Lee, 1988). Dancers develop a tunnel-like vision, where their focus is solely on dance (Gordon, 1983). They do not pay attention to what is going on outside their ballet world and have no energy to discover this other world (Gordon, 1983).

Ballet companies are not a democracy (Hamilton, 1998) and it is at the professional level that the ballet cultures hierarchical levels become apparent (Gordon, 1983). At the top of the hierarchy is the choreographer or artistic director of the ballet company (Gordon, 1983). The person in this position, most often held by a male (Gordon, 1983), exerts complete control over the ballet dancers' careers (Hamilton, 1998). The dancers are expected to obey orders given by the choreographer rather than thinking for themselves (Gordon, 1983). The choreographer also has the power to decide when ballet dancers should retire from their performing careers (Gordon, 1983). Under the choreographer are the prima ballerinas and premier danseur, followed by the

principal dancers, soloists and finally the corps de ballet, which is the bottom level (Gordon, 1983).

Ballet dance careers are short in duration compared to other occupations, including other performance careers (Geben, 1999; Hamilton, 1998; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). For such a short career, it may take approximately 20 years to learn the skills needed to become a professional ballet dancer (Wulff, 1998). Ballet dancers usually start performing professionally in their late teens (Hamilton, 1998; Pulinkala, 2011) and most retire around the age of 30 years (Hamilton, 1998; Pickman, 1987; Roncaglia, 2006). This age of retirement is still relatively young compared to workers in other performance careers and other occupations (Geben, 1999); therefore, the dancer must deal with career transitions at a much earlier time than individuals in the general population. However, because of the points raised above, professional ballet dancers often have few financial or personal resources at their disposal to aid in coping with their career transition.

Career Transitions of Professional Ballet Dancers

Roncaglia (2006) conducted a qualitative study using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and Grounded Theory, which investigated retiring from a professional ballet career. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight female and six male international retired professional ballet dancers. It was found that there are many reasons for retirement from a professional ballet career, both voluntary and involuntary. These included deselection, age, physical abilities, change of interests, family priorities, redundancy or injury (Roncaglia, 2006). Regardless of the reason, the average age of retirement for ballet dancers is approximately 30 years of age. Few people who retire at this young age can afford to stop working, especially

ballet dancers who generally make little money during their dance careers (Roncaglia, 2006). Because ballet dancers will have approximately 30 years remaining before they are eligible for a pension (Roncaglia, 2006), they need to be reintegrated into the workforce (Roncaglia, 2006). Thus, at a relatively young age they will go through a career transition (Geben, 1989). There has been an increased interest in how professional dancers make the transition to life after dance (Buckroyd, 2000), especially because the careers of the general population are starting to resemble the temporary and uncertain nature of professional ballet careers (Wainwright & Turner, 2004). Retiring from a professional dance career places the ballet dancer in a difficult situation; however, there are many facilitators that help make the transition to life after dance a success. The following sections examine the challenges professional ballet dancers face during their career transition and the facilitators that can help ease the transition. It is possible that elite dancers who are unable to dance professionally may experience similar career transition challenges as professional ballet dancers. Therefore, the facilitators that can aid in professional ballet dancers success during their career transition may also be helpful for elite amateur dancers.

Challenges Associated With Professional Ballet Career Transitions

Whatever the reason for retirement from a performing career, the effects can be traumatic (Pickman, 1987) and bring worries regarding the future (Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). In 2000, a large research study was conducted that investigated the challenges and realities that professional dancers face as they transition to second careers (Baumol et al., 2004). The study involved a number of different components. Dance activity was examined in a number of countries including: Australia, Canada, England, France, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United States. Hypotheses relating to improving both the transition process and the institutions involved in this phenomenon were tested, and an

examination of the available programs that offered assistance to this population during the transition phase was completed. Finally, surveys were given to both current and former professional dancers from the areas of classical/ballet, modern/contemporary, indigenous/folk, musical theatre/commercial and other, which included dancers working in movies, television, fashion shows, revues, cruise ships, corporate events and other less organized dance forms from the United States, Australia, and Switzerland. Jeffri (2005) and Jeffri & Throsby (2006) went on to publish some of the results from the surveys. Overall, the researchers found that career transitions of professional dancers involve financial, emotional, and educational difficulties in which the effects can be seen long past the transition phase (Baumol et al., 2004; Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006).

Retirement from a performing career and the corresponding career transition is not something that ballet dancers tend to think about during their performing career, especially because retirement means leaving something that defines who they are (Roncaglia, 2006). Thus, many dancers choose to ignore or deny their looming retirement, which is what Baumol et al. (2004) found among the former dancers surveyed who responded that they were not prepared for the transition (Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). However, most of the current dancers surveyed said that they were aware of the inevitable career transition and the challenges it posed (Baumol et al., 2004; Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). The reasons given for this difference included (a) the concept of career transitions for dancers is talked about more today, (b) is thought to be a part of the career process leading to more opportunities for these dancers to examine transition issues, and (c) there are more supports available to help dancers through their journey as compared to when former dancers were transitioning (Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). One point raised in anecdotal evidence and research study findings is that those not

psychologically ready to retire from performing, are unlikely to prepare for the career transition (Jeffri & Throsby, 2006; Pickman, 1987). This is unfortunate because research findings have shown that those professional dancers who are prepared for the career transition experience higher satisfaction with their second careers and have higher income immediately following the transition compared to those dancers who are not prepared (Baumol et al., 2004; Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006).

Ballet dancers, from an early age, focus solely on dancing; therefore, they do not explore other possible occupations (Pickman, 1987). As a result, when it comes time for these dancers to stop dancing professionally, they have little knowledge or training for other careers, and have little experience in the exploration of other career options (Pickman, 1987). Although many dancers may want to stay in the dance field, it may be unrealistic as there are only a small number of employment opportunities in dance companies for jobs such as dance teachers, choreographers and costume designers (Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). Evidence both supports and refutes this statement. Baumol et al., (2004) found that approximately half of the current professional dancers surveyed from Australia and Switzerland were set on finding dance-related employment after retirement; however, only one quarter of those surveyed from the United States wanted to remain in this area (Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). What is interesting is that many of the retired professional dancers from Switzerland and Australia did indeed pursue employment in dance related fields; but, only one quarter of those living in the United States were in dance-related positions (Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). Therefore, it may be possible that dance-related positions are somewhat scarce in the United States compared to Switzerland and Australia, which leads many retired American dancers to look outside the dance field for employment opportunities. There were also a number of dancers surveyed, from all three

countries, who wanted to leave the world of dance entirely and embark on a completely new journey (Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). It is worth noting that, despite their chosen second career areas, about half of the retired dancers did some teaching and choreography post-transition.

As a result of an intense pursuit of dance from an early age, dancers have limited academic backgrounds (Greben, 1989; Pulinkala, 2011). In fact, most professional dancers do not pursue higher education while in their performing career (Hanna, 1988; Pulinkala, 2011). This forces many dancers to go back to school to obtain the training they need for their new career (Gordon, 1983). However, this may be changing as the participant pool for studies conducted within the last decade shows that some types of professional dancers do receive some level of post-secondary education sometime prior to retirement (Baumol et al., 2004; Jeffri, 2005). Some of these studies looked specifically at professional ballet dancers (Roncaglia, 2006). Studies are also beginning to emerge that are investigating partnerships between professional ballet companies and universities offering degrees in dance, allowing dancers to obtain an education while performing (Pulinkala, 2011). Nevertheless, post-secondary education has been reported as less common among professional ballet dancers due to the intense nature of their training and careers, as compared to other professional dancers (Baumol et al., 2004; Pulinkala, 2011). Despite this, Baumol et al. (2004) found that returning to school posed challenges for dancers, as tuition is costly and a degree takes time to complete; and both are limited resources for retired dancers (Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). Conversely, the results revealed that those professional dancers who completed a post-secondary education after retirement had higher income and greater job satisfaction than their counterparts who chose not to go back to school. It is interesting to note that the researchers also found that whether one decides to go back to school or not, dancers experience a decrease in income during the

transition; however, in many cases, after they have settled into their new career, incomes were higher than previous incomes earned while performing. In addition to the monetary issues, once the ballet dancers have been retrained for an alternative career and are ready to enter the workforce, they must compete with workers who have established careers in the chosen field (Roncaglia, 2006).

Retiring dancers may feel immense loss after leaving their performing career (Pickman, 1987). Roncaglia's (2008) qualitative study included two case studies, one male and one female, and focused on the emotions of professional ballet dancers before, during, and after the career transition. It was found that that right before the retirement, dancers may feel a loss of control because retirement means confronting something unknown, a new future. Also it was found that dancers may feel a number of other losses immediately after retirement such as: "loss of identity, loss of life skills, loss of routines and the loss of control over one's life" (Roncaglia, 2008, Disorientation/Sense of Loss, para. 1).

Anecdotal evidence has shown that loss may be experienced in the areas of identity, social support and activities in their daily routines (Hamilton, 1998). Dancers, with their intense and lifelong relationship with the art, define themselves almost solely through dance; therefore, retiring from a performing career means giving up who they are, that is, their identity (Pickman, 1987; Wainwright & Turner, 2004). This loss of identity can be very devastating to the dancer (Greben, 1992). The more energy that the dancer invests in the dancer identity, the more severe the identity issues will be (Schnitt, 1990).

Because the intensity of professional dance training leaves little time for friendships outside of dance, and most of the dancer's social support comes from friends in the company

(Greiben, 1999), retiring from dance and leaving their company leads to the loss of a social support network and source of security (Gordon, 1983; Greben, 1999; Pickman, 1987). Not only do dancers lose social support; but, they also give up the experience of working closely with colleagues, which only adds to their loneliness (Greiben, 2002). Similarly, because ballet dancers have classes and rehearsals typically six days a week, retiring from dance dramatically changes their daily schedules (Wainwright & Turner, 2004). Many ballet dancers find it hard to give up dancing daily due to the compulsion to dance as well as the decrease in physical activity (Wainwright & Turner, 2004). The latter can have negative effects on the ballet dancer's body image (Pickman, 1987; Wainwright & Turner, 2004).

The combination of these losses may lead to feelings of anger, frustration and depression (Pickman, 1987). It is not uncommon for dancers to self-medicate, using drugs and alcohol, or to develop eating disorders (Pickman, 1987). The ability to effectively adjust to the losses associated with retirement is a factor in the readiness of a dancer to stop performing. Thus, it is important that dancers find ways to cope with the losses that accompany leaving a performing career (Pickman, 1987). Jeffri and Throsby (2006) evoke this idea quite nicely, "the end of a career in dance is 'one of life's little deaths,' with dancers having to mourn the loss before embarking on a new career" (p. 57).

The culture of ballet can also pose challenges to the dancer when it comes time to retire from their performing career. Ballet dancers are taught that they are to be told what to do and not think for themselves from an early age; thus, they never learn to be autonomous (Greiben, 2002). They learn to become dependent upon individuals in positions of power, such as the choreographer, for leadership and opinions (Greiben, 2002). When the dancers retire from their performing career, they leave behind the individuals they have grown accustomed to following.

This poses challenges because they have not learned to exercise or trust their own judgment and they may have no one to turn to (Greben, 2002). Not having exercised the ability to think for themselves may lead to feelings of self-doubt and low self-confidence, which is not productive during the process of a career transition (Buckroyd, 2000; Greben, 2002). Finding another job that capitalizes on this level of dependency may be difficult (Wulff, 1998).

Facilitators When Retiring From Professional Ballet Careers

Although there are challenges during the career transition of retiring professional ballet dancers, there are certain facilitators that aid in making the transition a success. These facilitators include the age of the dancer, skills acquired during the ballet career, support given during the transition, and the use of coping strategies. The approximate age of retirement for ballet dancers is 30 years. This young age, as already mentioned, does provide challenges during the transition; however, it is also a facilitator for success. The advantage of this retirement age is the dancers are still young enough to successfully change careers (Greben, 1999). In addition, both anecdotal evidence and research findings have revealed that dancers learn many skills that can generalize to other careers (Baumol et al., 2004; Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006; Pickman, 1987; Roncaglia, 2006). These skills include: attention to detail, perseverance, intense concentration and determination, ability to evaluate themselves and make improvements, ability to take directions, ability to seek assistance from others when necessary (Pickman, 1987), team work, stamina, commitment, loyalty (Baumol et al., 2004; Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006), self-discipline (Baumol et al., 2004; Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006; Roncaglia, 2006); they are also hardworking and accustomed to high competition situations (Roncaglia, 2006). Thus, retiring dancers should be seen as a good investment for society (Roncaglia, 2006).

Baumol et al. (2004) found that there are many sources of support that professional dancers can utilize to make their career transition a success (Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). These support resources include: financial assistance, emotional support, counselling programs and services, job search preparation, advice and information, and assistance with education and training (Baumol et al., 2004; Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). These researchers also found that these supports can come from various places including dance companies, unions, service organizations, family, friends and dance transition centers. It is interesting to note that although there are various places that professional dancers can get support, the most important source of support identified by over half of the dancers surveyed was their family and friends (Baumol et al., 2004).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that career counselling is essential for retiring dancers to help them through the career transition (Geben, 1999; Pickman, 1987). There are three areas that need to be touched on to ensure successful dancer transitions to an alternative career. First, the counsellor must explore the dancer's readiness to retire from their performing career (Pickman, 1987). It is at this stage that the counsellor and dancer explore the emotional reactions of leaving a career that is part of their identity (Pickman, 1987). Second, alternative career options must be explored (Pickman, 1987). This can be accomplished by investigating all the dancer's interests outside of the dance world, even if the interests do not seem like a viable career option (Pickman, 1987). This can be a difficult stage for dancers because from an early age, they have been focused solely on their dance career, which left other interests and aspects of their lives underdeveloped (Geben, 1999). Therefore, it might be helpful to have dancers explore interests by exposing themselves to various work settings, through part-time work, volunteer work or educational placements (Pickman, 1987). Finally, the third essential area in

counselling retiring professional dancers, is looking for transferability of skills (Pickman, 1987). As previously discussed, dancers acquire many skills through dancing that can be transferred to their post-dance career. With the help of the counsellor, the dancer can recognize these skills and determine how they can be used in alternative careers (Pickman, 1987).

As previously mentioned, one component of the larger research study looking at the challenges of transitioning professional dancers, led by Baumol et al. (2004), was to examine specific programs available to this population as they transitioned to second careers (Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). A number of programs, specifically tailored to professional dancers, were identified that aided the transition process (Baumol et al., 2004; Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). Many dance schools and companies worldwide provide services solely to dancers as they move on to new careers, such as helping with retraining and searching for new jobs. There are four dance transition resource centers located in the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Canada, which offer services to professional dancers transitioning to post-performing careers. In Canada, the Dancer Transition Resource Centre (DTRC) is an organization that solely focuses on the transition of Canadian professional dancers to post-dance careers (DTRC, 2008). The Dance Transition Resource Centre was founded in 1985 and is the only organization in Canada that focuses on transitions to a performing career, within a performing career, or from a performing career. In order to qualify for membership one must (a) be 18 years of age, (b) have had a least one paid dance performance job, (c) be currently dancing at a professional level or have done so in the last two years, and (d) be currently looking for work as a dancer (DTRC, 2009). The DTRC membership is steadily growing, with membership at 611 individuals as of August 2008 (DTRC, 2008). Members come from all across Canada and are from a wide range of dance forms. The centre's main office is in Toronto with two additional

offices in Montreal and Vancouver. The DTRC offers its members academic, career, financial, legal and personal counselling. Members are also eligible for skills grants, which aid dancers in developing skills that can transfer to a second career. Retraining and subsistence grants are also available. These grants help defray the costs of post-secondary education needed for retraining. The centre also organizes professional development workshops on issues important to professional dancers, such as grant writing, injury prevention and financial planning. For student dancers who will be emerging to the professional level, the centre offers an annual cross Canada conference entitled “on the move/ danse transit” that offers career planning and networking opportunities (DTRC, 2011); however, there is no specific mention of preparing dancers for their inevitable retirement and career transition. Such “pre-career” workshops can be important, in that they can help the dancer prepare for the career transition, and the earlier one starts the better (Hamilton, 1998). In addition to the four dance transition centers, there are two more organizations that provide services to this population during their transition: the International Organization for the Transition of Professional Dancers provides aid to professional dancers throughout the world, and the Swiss Association for the Career Re-orientation of Professional Dancers, which supports dancers in Switzerland (Baumol et al., 2004; Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). Through their interviews with retired and current professional dancers, Baumol et al. (2004) found that these programs focusing on the transition of dancers are helpful (Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). As dancer transition programs are more common in the United States as compared to Australia and Switzerland, it is not surprising that the highest level of participation in these programs came from dancers residing in the United States (Baumol et al., 2004; Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). It was also found that participation is greater among current dancers than retired dancers, lending support to the idea that these programs are

becoming more available. However, it is interesting to note that the majority of both current and retired dancers from all three countries have not used the services provided by such transition programs.

On a somewhat different note, a number of coping strategies have been reported as helpful for professional ballet dancers transitioning to a second career (Roncaglia, 2010). Interviews with 14-retired professional ballet dancers (Roncaglia, 2006) were re-examined by Roncaglia (2010) to identify coping strategies used as the professional dancers transitioned to second careers. Whether in isolation or in combination, a number of different ways of coping were used by this population, and although some initially seemed counterproductive strategies, in the end they were helpful in moving dancers along in their journey to life after a professional ballet career (Roncaglia, 2010). Some dancers used denial, either denying that their retirement was looming or denying their identity. Others coped with the transition by alienating themselves from others because of the doubts they had about themselves. One participant discussed wanting to be in control, so he made the decision to let go of his performing career as a way of coping with the situation. Isolation was also mentioned as a way of coping with the transition, as a few dancers began questioning their dancer identity and, therefore, began disconnecting with it. Going even further, others mentioned using severance as a way to cope; they completely left the world of ballet, both mentally and physically. For example, one participant described moving to a different country and removing everything that was related to ballet out of her life. Another strategy was acceptance, the dancer accepting the fact that their career was ending as well as the dancer receiving acceptance from family and friends in order to help cope with the transition. Many dancers renegotiated what it meant to be a dancer in order to cope with the situation, that is, they were not dancing professionally anymore but still considered themselves ballet dancers

and were fine with that. Finally, reconstruction was mentioned as a strategy in that some dancers coped by reinventing themselves with the development of new roles and identities (Roncaglia, 2010).

Roncaglia (2008) focused on the emotions of the dancers during the career transition, right before retirement, right after retirement and when they have begun to find a new path. It was found that when dancers began to move onto a life without a performing career, they could feel openness toward what the new life had to offer (Roncaglia, 2008). This was an aspect of the accepting and renegotiating coping strategies described by Roncaglia (2010). Therefore, it may be that dancers start to use such coping strategies when they have begun to move on to another kind of life.

Unrealized Performance Ballet Careers

As previously mentioned, Stinson et al. (1990) conducted a qualitative study, which examined the experience of student dancers aged 16 to 18 not in professional dance programs. Although not a large focus of the study, there was a discussion about not attaining a performing career. It was found that all the young women interviewed had wanted to dance professionally at one time, and most felt a deep sadness at having to give up this dream. They mentioned not wanting to give up their dream, but felt that it was important to be realistic, and thus gave up their dream because they felt that they would not make it to the professional level. Although one young woman still had dreams of pursuing a professional career, but was aware of the challenges. Others were deciding what to do next and coming to terms with the idea that there are numerous options available to them. In regards to a future career in the dance field, the only options that were discussed were a professional dance career and becoming a dance teacher. In

general, teaching was not seen as an option by these young dancers, as they saw it as a less prestigious and not as rewarding as a performing career. One dancer summed this up as “I don’t particularly want to teach people to do what I should be doing myself” (Stinson et al., 1990, p. 19).

Buckroyd (2000) has worked extensively counselling student dancers. Through this work, she has found that students attending dance schools, who are unable to make it to the professional level, face similar emotional issues as professional dancers do during the end of their performing career. Like professional dancers, dance students’ identities are consumed by the desire to be a dancer; so, like professional dancers, when dance students leave dance they experience a loss of identity. Similar to professional dancers, the intense training students receive from a young age leaves little time to explore other possible occupations (Buckroyd, 2000).

Buckroyd (2000) also found that there are some issues that are solely faced by those amateur dancers who do not go on to achieve a performing career. Unlike professional dancers who have lived their dream, these students have to give up their dream of becoming a professional dancer and need to come to realize that their dream is unattainable. This can make the transition from an amateur performing career more difficult, and leave the student feeling foolish and possibly useless, leading to decreased self-esteem and depression. Also, because amateur dancers do not make it professionally, they cannot look back at what they accomplished in their career as a way of helping them through the transition.

Taken together, Buckroyd (2000) found that the transition to life after dance for student dancers can be difficult. However, the level of difficulty they experienced depended upon the

student. The transition was less stressful for those students who realized that they were not going to make it professionally and thus explored other interests and possible careers. However, those students who developed tunnel vision regarding dance had a harder time transitioning to life after dance.

As in the case of transitioning out of a professional career, Buckroyd (2000) discovered that there are facilitators that can help those who do not attain a professional career, to move to another kind of life. These facilitators include: mourning losses experienced by not attaining the dream, re-establishing identity, discovering a new direction and preparation for the transition. There are a number of losses that the student dancer needs to mourn after realizing that they will be unable to fulfill their goal of becoming a professional dancer. First, the student must mourn the loss of the dream. Dance students most likely had the dream of becoming a ballerina long before they started at a professional school, thus giving up this dream can be devastating. This loss may be harder to deal with than the loss of an actual professional career, as the students must mourn the loss of something they never achieved; they are left with unfilled hopes, dreams and expectations. Also, these students are only left with rosy views of the ballet world, because they never had the chance to experience the negative side of becoming a professional dancer. Thus, they are mourning a fantasy as opposed to a reality, making it that much harder to move on.

Second, the amateur dancer must mourn the structure that training to be a professional ballerina provided (Buckroyd, 2000). Dance students know what they have to do to dance professionally, and most do not explore other possible career options. Thus, to them, the course of their future is decided, they will dance professionally; no exceptions are considered. Therefore, it is distressing when they are unable to realize their dream and must reevaluate their

future plans. The major difficulty lies in attempting to reevaluate the future when one has never explored other possible career options. In addition, students also lose the structure of attending a professional school. While attending school, the students are provided with a routine, friends and trusted teachers. When the student leaves the professional school, their everyday routines, friends and teachers are left behind and they must start over by developing new routines, establishing new non-dance friendships and getting to know their new teachers or mentors.

Third, when student dancers transition to life after dance, they lose their identity as a dancer and must mourn this loss (Buckroyd, 2000). The identity of a dancer carries a certain level of prestige and dancers are proud to identify themselves as dancers; therefore, losing this identity is that much more painful. Professional dancers have their memories of their professional careers to hold on to when they lose their identity. Although student dancers have memories from their training, they never had the chance to make such professional memories; therefore, when they lose their identity, they have less to take with them.

Re-establishing their sense of identity is a facilitator that can help amateur dancers move on (Buckroyd, 2000). This does not mean denying their identity as a dancer as they will always be a dancer, even though they will not dance professionally. Rather, they must come to realize that dancing is not solely who they are; it is only one part of their identity. Buckroyd (2000) found through working with this population that re-establishing identity can be especially difficult for students who use dance as a way of hiding from the emotional issues in their lives or those who hold tightly their narrowly defined identity as a dancer. Buckroyd (2000) suggested that these students will need more support during the transition to a non-dance career.

Exploring a new direction in one's life was found to be helpful when transitioning out of an amateur dance career (Buckroyd, 2000). If the students are still school age, they will return to main-stream education. If the student dancers have graduated, then attending post-secondary education may be an option. Regardless of age, exploring others areas in which the dancer may have interests is vital. This can be a difficult process as the dancer has focused their energy solely on their dance career from an early age. However, a number of things can be done to help the student with the exploration of interests. First, it can be helpful for the dancer to deconstruct what led them to pursue a career in dance to uncover hidden interests. Second, the dancer can be encouraged to think of other areas besides dance that might have interested them. Third, it may be helpful to investigate activities they missed out on as a result of the intense training they incurred.

One last facilitator reported by Buckroyd (2000) was preparing for the transition while still training. If the student dancers are aware the transition to a career away from performing is coming, they will have time to gradually get used to the idea, which will aid in the grieving process. They will have time to explore other possible interests and career options, and make plans for their future. In addition, it is important for the student dancer to identify the skills they have learned throughout their training that can be transferred to other occupations.

Critique

The literature on the career transitions of professional dancers is relatively small. It is mostly comprised of anecdotal evidence from authors who have written books or published articles about their work with professional dancers in a counselling capacity. This lends itself to a number of limitations. It is difficult to know the quality of this anecdotal evidence as it is not

held to the same standards as peer-reviewed research publications. In addition, much of the literature on career transitions includes a mix of dancers from various disciplines, which makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the transition process for ballet dancers specifically.

Despite these limitations, the literature on the career transitions of professional dancers does provide stories about transitioning out of performing careers that are not confined by the parameters of research studies; but rather, have been told in a clinical setting where information was gathered over a long period of time, as the counselling relationship matured. Another strength of this body of literature is that findings from research studies on career transitions of professional dancers are consistent with the findings from anecdotal evidence.

The literature on amateur ballet dancers who wanted to achieve a ballet career but were unable to and, therefore, had to make another kind of life, is even more limited. Most of the literature is comprised of anecdotal evidence from working with student dancers in a therapeutic capacity. The most relevant report on this phenomenon was a book written by Buckroyd (2000). This book discussed different issues facing amateur student dancers attending dance schools. Her analysis was based on her interactions with these dancers in a counselling role and again did not focus specifically on ballet dancers (Buckroyd, 2000). This report highlighted the fact that some of the same issues are experienced by both amateur and professional dancers; however, the report also discussed issues that seem to be specific to amateur dancers. This highlights the need for further inquiry specifically examining the transition of amateur ballet dancers who are unable to attain a professional career.

The Present Study

The literature exploring the career transitions into life after dance predominately focuses on those dancers who are retiring from a professional performing career. The primary interest is in how to aid this transition. On the other hand, there is very little research examining the post-dance lives of amateur dancers, despite there being many more elite amateur dancers unable to make it to the professional ranks than professional dancers. It seems the amateur and professional dancers face many of the same problems. It is unknown what happens to these individuals once amateur dancers leave the world of dance (Schnitt, 1990) and more research needs to be done with this population (Alter, 1997). The present research focused on the narratives of women who dreamed of becoming a ballerina, were unable to, and had to transition to a life after dance. The central question I explored in this thesis was: What is it like to be an elite female dancer who is unable to achieve a professional dancing career and must make another kind of life for herself?

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

The following chapter provides an overview of qualitative inquiry and the principles that informed the study's research design. In addition, details of procedure are presented. This section includes strategies used to recruit participants, and to generate, analyze, and present the data. A discussion of trustworthiness criteria and ethical issues conclude the chapter.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is an inquiry process in which a researcher investigates a social or human issue and “builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.” (Creswell, 1998, p.15). The intent is often to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the participants' perspective (Merriam, 2002).

Bogdan and Knopp Biklen (2007) described five distinguishing characteristics of qualitative research. First, the research is often conducted in a natural setting, or in such a way that the phenomenon under study is minimally distorted. Context is important because qualitative researchers believe that human action is best understood in the setting in which it occurs. Second, the data produced by qualitative research are richly descriptive. Rather than reducing data to numbers, qualitative data are represented in words, pictures and other artistic means, which leads to a greater holistic understanding of the phenomenon and strives to represent more fully the meaning that participants convey. Third, qualitative research focuses on the process rather than on the outcome of the study. In other words, the researcher is concerned with the journey the participants take to construct meaning of a phenomenon. Fourth, qualitative research utilizes inductive processes to analyze data. Researchers develop theories by piecing

together collected data. This is contrasted with deductive analysis, used in quantitative research, which approaches the study with theories or hypothesis and uses collected data to prove or disprove these claims. Fifth, qualitative research investigates how participants understand and give meaning to a phenomenon. In other words, researchers are interested in how individuals make sense of their experiences. The belief that humans generate knowledge and meaning from their experience characterizes a constructivist paradigm (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). The constructivist approach assumes there are many different but equally valid social realities (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). Thus, there is an emphasis on subjectivity (Morrow, 2007). Meaning is co-constructed by the participant and researcher (Haverkamp & Young, 2007), therefore the researcher's values are an important piece to this research (Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Morrow, 2007). The researcher is expected to continuously examine and understand how their values influence the research process (Haverkamp & Young, 2007).

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a particular approach to qualitative research that focuses on stories. The practice of storytelling has been around since humans began to communicate (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) and is a natural process of individuals' everyday lives. It is thought that the stories individuals tell help to explain human experience (Riessman, 2008). When individuals are faced with unexpected situations in their lives, storytelling can help make sense of their experiences (Riessman, 2008). Narrative inquiry studies stories that individuals tell about a phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 2007; Riessman, 2008), with the data consisting of an individual's first person account of their experience in a story form (Merriam, 2002). The stories are not just restricted to verbal accounts, but can include written and visual forms (Riessman, 2008).

Narrative inquiry is distinguished from other qualitative methodologies by its focus on sequences of action (Abbott as cited in Riessman, 2008). In other words, narrative inquiry concentrates on “particular actors, in particular social places, at particular social times” (Abbott as cited in Riessman, 2008, pp. 11). The researcher is concerned with how the narrator chooses events to share, the order in which they are shared (Riessman, 2008), what language and visual images are used to communicate meaning to the audience (Riessman, 2008), and the intention behind the narrative (Riessman, 2008).

Narratives are chronological, meaning that they follow a sequential order of events (Elliott, 2005). Narratives that individuals tell are meaningful (Elliott, 2005), and they are social in nature as narratives are created for particular audiences (Elliott, 2005) and provide social interaction among narrator and researcher (Riessman, 2008).

As mentioned, narratives are a natural part of human’s everyday lives; but they have specific functions in research. First, narratives help individuals to remember and make sense of the past (Riessman, 2008). Second, identities can be constructed through storytelling (Riessman, 2008). Third, storytelling can engage others in the narrator’s experience (Riessman, 2008). Fourth, storytelling can be used to motivate the audience into action for social change (Riessman, 2008).

The Present Study

Participant Selection and Recruitment

The women in the present study were recruited using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a strategy by which participants are selected based on their experience with the phenomenon under study (Bogdan & Knopp Biklen, 2007). Specific criteria for inclusion are

developed to determine inclusion in the study (Patton, 2002). In the present study, women were recruited who once dreamed of becoming a ballerina and actively pursued this dream, but were unable to achieve it, and as a result, had to make an alternative life. The following inclusion criteria were used: (a) female, (b) 18 years of age or older, (c) a former ballet dancer, (d) auditioned at least once for a professional ballet school, (e) wanted to dance professionally, but was unable to realize this dream, (f) struggled to navigate the transition to life after dance, (g) feel they are currently living a meaningful, satisfying life and (h) are currently motivated to reflect upon this experience. The population of female dancers was chosen for this study for a number of reasons. Male dancers can start training at an older age than female dancers because of body characteristics (Hamilton, 1998). There are more female professional dancers than there are male dancers. As mentioned previously, in Canada, 85% of professional dancers are female (Canada Council for the Arts, 2004). Due to the greater number of female dancers, there is more competition among females (Wulff, 1998). Approximately 22% of female dancers obtain full time position in a company compared to 61% of males (Hamilton, 1998). In addition, males have a greater chance to become a principle dancer in a ballet company as compared to females (Hamilton, 1998). Female professional dancers earn less money than male dancers, approximately four to five thousand dollars less a year (Hamilton, 1998). Also, as a result of the high numbers, female dancers can “get away with less” than male dancers (Geben, 2002). In other words, behavior that is seen as unacceptable is often over looked for males but not females, because there are more replacements for females as compared to male dancers. Females and male dancers also have different family responsibilities (Hamilton, 1998). For instance, it is the female and not the male dancer who must take time off from the performing career to start a family (Geben, 1991), therefore, many female dancers do not start families while still

performing (Gordon, 1983). For all these reasons, it is believed that female and male dancers experience the career transition differently, and thus should be looked at separately in research. It is also important for the women to have auditioned at least once for a professional ballet school because it shows that they were serious about their intention of becoming a professional ballerina.

In order to recruit participants, posters were advertised at two post-secondary institutions, chosen on the basis that they include populations that are pursuing careers through further education. Posters were also placed in a local dance wear store, Pilates studio and at a non-profit organization that promotes all forms of dance in the province of Saskatchewan. In addition, an ad was placed in the non-profit organization's e-newsletter, which is sent out monthly to its members. The latter locations were chosen to recruit women who have either completed their post-secondary education or have chosen to go down a different path (See Appendix A). Potential participants contacted me by email and we arranged a time for me to call. During this call, the women were given more information about the study and were screened for inclusion based on the above criteria (see Appendix B). In addition, they were given an opportunity to ask any questions that they might have about participating. A snowball sampling strategy was also used. In snowball sampling, participants refer other individuals who they believe meet the inclusion criteria (Bogdan & Knopp Biklen, 2007). Handouts describing the project and containing contact information were offered to each woman at the end of their first interview (See Appendix A).

I anticipated recruiting three to five participants and was able to obtain five women who were interested in participating in the study and met the inclusion criteria. The small sample size allowed for the collection and analysis of rich narrative data. The women were selected in the

order they responded to the ad, until the desired sample size and sufficient richness of data was achieved.

Data Generation

The primary source of data was semi-structured interviews (See Appendix C). The interviews for four of the women were conducted on a university campus, and one woman was interviewed at her place of employment. Three interviews were conducted, which varied from approximately an hour to an hour and a half in duration. The first interview comprised of the women telling me their story of transitioning to life after dance, in the second and third interviews we discussed their stories, as told in the first interview, and engaged in a more analytical discussion (e.g., identifying barriers, facilitators, coping strategies). In addition the second and third interviews gave opportunities to discuss any clarification or misunderstanding of issues that arose during the interviews. All interviews were fully tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. The women were informed of this prior to the interview process. After each interview, the women were emailed a copy of the full transcript and a summary of the transcript. They were given the opportunity to review these documents and provide the researcher with feedback regarding any errors or misinterpretation and if there was any information that came out in the interview that they did not feel comfortable being used in the final document.

I also invited the women to identify and share personally meaningful objects (e.g., photographs, costumes, certificates, trophies) that represented their life of dance as well as other similar objects that represented their life after dance for all three interviews. These objects were used to enrich/enhance the interview process and also acted as a secondary data source,

providing further insight about the post-dance transition. Each interview began with the women being asked to talk about the objects they brought in. In these discussions, the women described the meaningful object and its importance to them. At the end of each interview, the meaningful objects brought in by the women were photographed and/or scanned by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the women's narratives. Thematic analysis focuses on the content of each participant's story (Riessman, 2008). In other words, this method focuses on what the participants said. The transcriptions were interpreted by identifying themes common across the women's stories (Riessman, 2008). Data analysis began with the first interview and was on ongoing throughout the interview process. After each interview I made notes in a journal about anything that stood out from the interview. These notes were referred to throughout the process of data analysis.

After each interview was completed the interviews were transcribed and then the interviews were listened to a second time to double check the transcripts for accuracy (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998). While reading, possible themes and relevant ideas were written down in the margin of the transcripts. The transcripts were read through multiple times looking for broad common themes shared across the women's stories (Lieblich et al., 1998). Once these broad themes were established, quotes that represented these themes were sorted into the relevant categories (Bogdan & Knopp Biklen, 2007; Kearney, 2001; Lieblich et al, 1998). This process was visually displayed using a table that outlined the themes and corresponding verbal expressions (Kearney, 2001). This visual diagram showed the links between each theme and the phenomenon under study (Kearney, 2001). My supervisor and I met regularly to discuss

these themes and worked to condense these broad themes into more specific themes. Five main themes and corresponding sub-themes were common in the women's stories: discovering the dream (beginnings), living the dream (auditions, rites of passage and immersion in the culture of ballet), losing the dream, life after the dream (new relationships with dance, challenges, facilitators and correcting the past) and making meaning.

In regards to the personally meaningful objects, the number and type of objects varied greatly among the women. For example, objects representing their dance life included photographs, pointe shoes, ballet shoes, a report card and dance competition awards. Objects representing post-dance life comprised of newspaper articles, photographs and acceptance letters for grad school and scholarships. After the completion of the interviews, my supervisor and I discussed the different types of objects brought by each woman. What was striking is that four out of the five women brought in their pointe shoes and the fifth woman wanted to but they were unavailable. Through this discussion it was decided that there was something very powerful about pointe shoes that needed to be highlighted.

I reread the transcripts and highlighted all quotes relevant to pointe shoes. Broad themes common across the women stories were developed and quotes relevant to those themes were categorized. The themes were also represented in a visual format similar to the one used in the analysis of the women's narratives. Through discussions with my supervisor, these themes were condensed.

Trustworthiness

Specific criteria are used to judge the quality of qualitative research, which is referred to by various terms such as validity, credibility, rigor and trustworthiness (Morrow, 2005). For the

purpose of this discussion, the term trustworthiness will be used. Morrow (2005) argued that there are a number of universal criteria that can be used to determine the trustworthiness of all qualitative research studies regardless of the paradigm. These criteria include: social validity, subjectivity and reflexivity, adequacy of data, and adequacy of interpretation.

Social validity addresses the social value that the research holds. The social value that the present study holds is bringing to awareness the issues of life after dance for those women unable to achieve their dream of becoming a ballerina. Subjectivity and reflexivity address the researcher's ability to effectively deal with their assumptions and biases which are relevant to the phenomenon under study. This research developed from my personal experience with the phenomenon under study; therefore I had assumptions and prior understanding as well as personal knowledge regarding this topic. As advised by Ahern (1999), I engaged in both bracketing and reflexivity. Bracketing involved setting aside my assumptions as much as possible so that I could be open to the participants' experiences; Reflexivity involved keeping a self-reflective journal throughout the research process in which I wrote about my assumptions, biases, experiences and reactions to the women and their stories (Morrow, 2005). I remained in continuous contact with my research supervisor in order to discuss how my personal history informed my understanding of the participants' experience, e.g., identifying blind spots as well as (Morrow, 2005). Also, of concern is whose realities are represented in the research, those of the participants or the researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). If there was something that came up during the interview I was unsure of I asked the women for clarification (Morrow, 2005). Once my interpretations of the interview transcripts were completed I had the women read them to ensure I captured their correct experience. Adequacy of data addresses the point at which there is sufficient rich data for analysis. There were a number of things done to increase the

likelihood of acquiring sufficient rich data: (a) purposeful sampling was used to ensure that the women had direct experience with the phenomenon (Morrow, 2005); (b) three interviews were conducted with each woman; and (c) personally meaningful objects brought in by each of the women to help stimulate conversation as well as provide a secondary source of data. Adequacy of interpretation addresses the quality of the analysis process, the interpretation phase, as well as the presentation of findings. As a first time researcher, I interpreted the results to the best of my ability. I fully immersed myself in the data and was open to the themes that arose (Morrow, 2005). I was also in close contact with my research supervisor throughout this period discussing my findings.

In addition to general criteria for qualitative research, Morrow and Smith (2000) suggested that there are trustworthiness criteria which are specific to each research paradigm. Guba and Lincoln (1989) presented five criteria which are specific to the constructivist research paradigm. These criteria include: fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity. Fairness refers to the investigation and inclusion of multiple constructions in the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Through discussions with my supervisor, I ensured that my perspectives regarding the phenomenon under study did not overshadow those of the research participants. Ontological authenticity refers to enhancement of the participant's own constructions throughout the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). By telling their story and reflecting upon the meaning they have placed on their experience, it was hoped that the women would gain a new found understanding of the phenomena under study. All of the women described being positively affected by participating in this research project. Ella spoke of how this process helped her come to terms with things that she never dealt with previously. For Megan the interviews gave her the opportunity to reflect

upon her experience and brought about greater awareness of her experience. She also never talked about her experiences before so she really enjoyed being able to do so, especially with someone who had gone through the phenomenon as well, and had some shared understanding. Reflecting on her experiences made Piper appreciate the dance opportunities that she had growing up. Sam spoke of telling her story leading her to make connections between her experience with the phenomena and the person she is today. Lily found she really enjoyed reflecting upon her experiences as a young ballet dancer and like Sam, also made connections between these experiences and the person she is today. Educative authenticity refers to the participants' ability to understand and appreciate the constructions of others (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). This was not a goal of this study as the women did not have access to the others' stories during the research process; however, this criterion may be incorporated if the women learn about other perspectives by reading the finished product. Many of the women spoke of being curious about the others' experience with the phenomenon and were eager to read the different stories in the final document. Catalytic authenticity refers to the ability of the research to stimulate change (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Tactical authenticity refers to the ability of the research to facilitate change (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). It is hoped that these women's stories will give insight into the issues faced by ballet dancers unable to reach a professional level, however, stimulating or facilitating change was not within the scope of this research. Morrow (2005) has added two more criteria to further expand and strengthen Guba and Lincoln's criteria. Meaning addresses the extent to which the meaning the participants give to phenomenon is completely understood by the researcher. To ensure that I had a complete understanding of the women's meaning I asked for clarification when needed, and I had them read my interpretations. Co-construction addresses the extent in which meaning is mutually constructed by the participant

and researcher. It is hoped that the co-construction of meaning was met as the researcher listened to the women's stories and worked together to develop a clear understanding of the meaning that the women gave to the phenomenon under study.

The study was also informed by Lieblich et al.'s (1998) criteria: width, coherence, insightfulness and parsimony. Width addresses the quality of the data, data analysis and interpretation (Lieblich et al., 1998). Coherence addresses the extent to which the strands of interpretation come together and form a complete and meaningful picture (Lieblich et al., 1998). Insightfulness addresses the extent to which the story and its analysis are presented in an original way (Lieblich et al., 1998). Parsimony refers to the researchers' ability to provide an analysis using a small number of ideas, as well as the aesthetic appeal of the research process. I strove to meet these criteria, to the best of my ability.

Ethical Considerations and Approval

Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board (see Appendixes D and E). Prior to the interview process, each of the women were asked to review and sign a consent form (See Appendix F). This form provided information regarding the study, the benefits and risks of participating, outlined confidentiality issues and highlighted their right to refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty (Richard & Morse, 2007). The women were also asked to sign a transcript release form (Appendix G) and a photograph release form (see Appendix H). This gave the researcher permission to use the transcripts, the photographs and other artistic presentations collected in the course of the study. These forms were given to the women to sign after they had been given each interview transcript and summary and given the opportunity to

provide the researcher with feedback. At the end of the third interview the women were provided contact information if they wished to obtain more information about the study or a copy of the final document (see Appendix I)

In order to maintain confidentiality throughout the research process, all audiotapes, transcriptions and photographs were available only to the student researcher and thesis committee members. Throughout the study, these materials were stored in a safe place by the researching student. These items will be stored in the office of the supervising researcher for five years upon completion of the research project. In the final thesis document, the women were given pseudonyms and identifying information was minimized.

It was possible that participating in the study could have brought up negative feelings despite the women meeting the criteria of (a) being motivated to reflect upon their experience and (b) feeling like they are currently living a meaningful, satisfying life. Recalling memories may be distressing. I was sensitive to this possibility and if such a time arose was prepared to continue the interview only with the agreement of the woman. A list of follow up support resources was made available to each of the women at the beginning of the study (see Appendix J).

CHAPTER 4: Results

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the results of the present study. The chapter begins with a description of the women, followed by their stories of transitioning to a life after giving up their dream of becoming a professional ballerina. Their stories are highlighted with themes that were identified across the interviews and include select photos of the women's key personally meaningful object, pointe shoes.

In order to protect the confidentiality of the women they were given pseudonyms and identifying information was altered. Excerpts from the women's stories are included as told in the interviews with minor alterations to protect confidentiality and maintain readability.

The Women

Ella

In her late twenties, Ella was a grad student trying to complete her thesis and working full time in the field of her studies at the time of the interviews. She began dancing at an early age and in her teens attended a professional ballet school but had to leave due to injuries, which ultimately ended her amateur ballet career. This experience led her to walk away from ballet, but she has since found a way to let dance back in her life.

Ella described her face as being an open book explaining "I've got a really expressive face and apparently I can say more in an eyebrow raise than most people can talking". This was evident in all three interviews as she was very expressive with both her language and facial expressions. When describing her experience of leaving ballet behind, her use of words such as "depressed", "angry" and "fighting" reinforced her story about this being a painful chapter in her life. However, her face lit up when describing ballet, her recently discovered new dance form, and her academic success, which revealed just how passionate she is about these areas.

Ella brought many personally meaningful objects with her to the first interview. Her objects included many pictures of her at various stages in her life including dance pictures spanning from her very first years of dance to within the year that she quit, her high school graduation, traveling and various adventures that she has been on. She also brought in her ballet shoes and pointe shoes. In addition she brought in many documents ranging from her acceptance letter to the master's program and her scholarship, to newspaper articles that cited her research. Taken together, these objects paint a picture of Ella as a woman who has accomplished many things in her life thus far.

Lily

Lily was at a later stage in her life compared to the rest of the women and at the time of the interviews she was working full time at a ballet school in an administrative position and teaching ballet. Lily starting dancing at a young age and spent almost her entire school-aged years attending a professional ballet school, but when it came time to move on to the upper-level school she was not invited. She left the world of ballet and built a different life for herself expressing "I became a completely different person and the ballet world just didn't exist for me anymore". However, years later she eventually found herself back in the dance studio wondering "how could I have left this for so long?"

Throughout the interviews her deep connection with ballet was illustrated with her constant use of the word "love" and how her face lit up every time she talked about it, both past and present. Lily brought a number of personally meaningful objects with her to the first interview from her life at the ballet school. These objects included her first and last pair of pointe shoes, that in her words "I would die if I ever lost these", an old report card, and books from her ballet school that contained pictures of her during her time there. It was apparent from

the interviews, and objects that she brought in, that ballet was and continues to be a large part of her life.

Megan

At the time of the first interview Megan, who was in her early twenties, had just finished her first year of university and was working a summer job. By the time we met for the third interview Megan had obtained a full time job and decided not to attend school that following fall as a result of home-life issues. Megan started dancing at a young age and auditioned for a professional ballet school twice; the first time she was accepted but did not attend for financial reasons and the second time she was not accepted. Although she continued to dance, she eventually quit and at the time of the interviews was not dancing, but missed it greatly.

Megan spoke openly about the obstacles and heart ache that she has faced in her life thus far and stated dancing “made everything better”. Her passion for dance was apparent by her persistence to not let money stand in her way of finding a way to have dance back in her life as she stated that “I will live off of alpagetti and KD just to afford to take one class because it is almost more important to me than anything else”.

Megan brought in many personally meaningful objects with her to the interviews, all of which were from her life while dancing. These objects included her pointe shoes, and like Lily, she voiced their great importance, many dance pictures, medals she had won at competitions, ballet exam certificates and the information package she received upon getting accepted to the ballet school’s summer program.

Piper

Piper who was in her mid-twenties at the time of the interviews was a grad student and ballet teacher. She started dancing at a young age and auditioned for a professional ballet school twice but was not accepted either time. Although sad, Piper did not let this experience discourage her. Unlike the three previous women, she never stopped dancing and at present she was still taking one class and stated “I said from the time I was about twelve I am going to dance until someone tells me to stop”.

Piper’s passion for ballet was obvious as she stated that “I feel the same way talking about ballet as a mom talking about her baby”. In addition she appeared almost childlike throughout the interviews with statements like “Every time I see ballet shoes in the store I still buy the little figurines. Why would you pass it up? Like if you could get a pink pencil with ballet slippers would you use it.. yes”. Piper’s personally meaning objects included two pictures, her first ballet picture from the year she started dancing and her most recent tap picture confirming that dance was and still is an important part of her life.

Sam

Sam, who was in her early twenties at the time of the interviews, had just finished her first year of university and was in the process of changing programs. In addition to being a full time student she was a dance teacher and danced in a local dance company. Unlike the other women, Sam started dancing later in childhood. She auditioned twice for a professional ballet school and was not accepted either time. She also did not let this experience discourage her and she never stopped dancing. In fact, she appeared to have an outlook about her experience that one would expect to see from a woman much older as she stated:

I'm very set on the fact that you've got to be thankful for what you have. Sure, take your time getting over what you don't have. But, until you've gotten over the fact that you're missing this or you're not talented enough in this you won't be able to look for what you are good at.

Sam's passion for dance was very evident throughout the interviews by the enthusiasm that she showed while talking about dance, teaching ballet and dancing in the company. She regularly made statements such as "I absolutely love it". She brought two personally meaning objects with her to the interviews, one from her childhood and the other from her life today. These objects included a picture of her and three of her dance friends that was taken ten years ago and a pair of recently purchased pointe shoes, which confirms that ballet still plays an important role in Sam's life.

The Women's Stories

An overarching framework was common across the five women's stories. This framework included: discovering the dream, living the dream, losing the dream, and life after the dream. Discovering the dream referred to how the women came to be involved in dancing. Living the dream characterized the women at a time in their lives when they still believed that they would be professional ballerinas. Losing the dream symbolized the time when the women realized that their dream of becoming a professional ballerina would not be attained. The last component of the framework, life after the dream, represented how these women navigated their journey after the death of their dream. The women's stories are presented within this framework. In addition to this overarching framework, it seemed that each woman described how they made

sense of their experience of transitioning to a life without their dream. This analysis is presented in a section entitled Making Meaning.

Discovering the Dream

Beginnings. Each woman told a story about how their dream began. Some were externally motivated, whereas others described being internally motivated to begin formal dance lessons. Ella, Lily and Sam found dance because of someone else. For example, Ella's mom was the main force behind her starting ballet.

I was three years old when I started. I really liked it, sometimes I am not sure whether I loved it, part of the reason why I was a dancer is because my mom wanted to be a dancer, right, so she put me in ballet. And then I happened to be quite good at it, and it was just a given that I was going to become a pro, because I could have become a professional, you know.

Lily described being brought to dancing because her school teacher noticed that Lily had talent in the area of dance.

For me it wasn't something that as a child I begged my mother to put me in dance classes. It was not something that I had always wanted to do as a little child. The way it happened was actually I was at school, just regular school, this would be about a five or six year old child. We had a class called rhythm and movement, which I absolutely loved, the teacher would put on music and we would just dance, acting out sort of whatever we felt. I would lose myself in the music; I would just absolutely love it. That teacher I think spoke to my mother and said your daughter really has got a talent for this sort of thing. My mother I think probably would have liked to have danced if she could

have, but she never had the opportunity as a child. So I think in a way it was sort of through her.

Sam found dance because her best friend at school took ballet and Sam wanted to be just like her.

I would have been I think in grade two and my best friend at the time was taking ballet classes and I just wanted to take ballet classes so badly. I kept asking and I kept asking and I kept asking and finally my mom said well no not ballet that is too hard core, you stand there and you do it, so she had put me in dance. I started with a studio that was a modern based, intro to dance, free movement kind of studio. So that is where I started when I was six. It took me a year to convince her that I wanted to take ballet, that's what I wanted. So when I was seven I got to move over to the main studio in my home city and from there I started with ballet.

In comparison, Megan and Piper described being internally motivated to dance. Megan, for example, started lessons because of the way she danced around the house as a young child.

My parents put me in when I was I think three years old. We have old home videos of even before I was three where I was dancing around in the kitchen, so they were like this is something we should try. It's just one of those things I don't remember not doing. It is the one thing I wanted to be doing. My parents said that I was three years old and I would wake up and be dressed on Saturday ready to go to dancing because I wanted to do it so bad.

Like Megan, Piper was also placed into dancing because of dance tendencies demonstrated at a young age.

For as long as I can remember all I wanted to do was dance. I remember my mom telling me that I didn't walk on flat feet when I learned to walk, I walked on my toes it was natural. And because I wanted to dance at such an early age that is all I did and I never wanted anything else. I started taking ballet lessons when I was four years old.

Living the Dream

Although each woman had a different story to tell about how they tried to pursue their dream of becoming a professional ballerina, there were commonalities shared across the five narratives.

Auditions. All five women tried out for professional ballet schools at one point on their journey to achieve their dream. Lily was accepted into a ballet school at a young age and spent most of her school-age years there.

The ballet school had auditions and my mother just put me into them. I didn't even know that she was doing it, it was just one day, I can't even remember how, I just remember going to the audition, and I got in. So I was eight or seven at the time and I was accepted as a junior associate, which was after school, like going to a ballet school after class. So I started going there. It was incredible, and I totally came into this world of ballet and absolutely fell in love with it. I guess just dancing because I went so frequently your body starts to want to do it too. So as a result of being put into it I started to get the desire and the sort of feel that I wanted to keep going with it. I was a junior associate until I was eight, so about three years, six, seven, eight something like that. Then I

auditioned for the school itself, the junior school, and again I got in. That is an amazing feeling because they accept so few people, sort of one in several hundred that ever get in. So it makes you feel very special that you made it in.

Ella attended ballet school much later in life and for a shorter period of time than Lily.

I did a couple of summer schools and I was admitted to the year both times I auditioned. I broke my foot so I did not go that first year. This was kind of the beginning of the end of my dance career. I have always struggled with injuries, but this was just the kicker. I went there for the year when I was 16. My first night there I remember standing in my room looking outside and thinking I am in a world class ballet school, I cannot believe I am here, it is absolutely just amazing, I have reached the pinnacle of my life and it is never going to get better than this, I was 16. That second year my body was in physical decline since my foot break that by January or February my body was such a mess that I had to stop, I had to leave school.

Sam and Piper had much different experiences than Ella and Lily because although they both auditioned for professional ballet schools a number of times in their youth, they were never accepted. During her early years of dance, Sam became friends with a small group of dancers and they all started auditioning together.

After a few years of us all dancing together I would say there was a group of probably five of us that were our group at dance. They started auditioning for professional ballet schools. I think I would have been maybe ten, eleven, twelve when I auditioned.

Actually that best friend of mine she went to a ballet school when she was eleven, stayed there, graduated and is now dancing professionally. So you would go to the audition with

a friend that was like a social event. Two of the girls that I would usually go with got in and the first time it was kind of a oh you know just bad luck. Second time though I still remember I was in the basement when the letter came and my mom had opened it upstairs for me and she came down crying, she was so upset she was like I really wanted you to get in. I remember going it's fine mom don't worry don't worry it's not a big deal, inside I am going oohh.

Piper auditioned for two different professional ballet schools and was not accepted to either one.

I auditioned for the first ballet school a couple times and I did the second ballet school audition two or three times. I would always do the workshops and then the workshop flowed into the audition. So I did those a couple times, mostly for the workshop, but for the audition practice anyways. I was never accepted. I think I saw it coming. I think I had probably been fore-warned that you probably won't make it. I was quite young so I am sure I was upset but I don't remember dwelling on it. I don't think I really ever walked away negatively from an audition. I always took it for what it's worth because you always have the class before the audition and I think I always went mostly because I liked the classes, the Master classes. I don't remember it every being a bad experience.

Megan's story was unique in that although she auditioned and was accepted into a professional ballet school, she did not attend because of financial constraints.

I tried out for the ballet school and ended up getting on the waiting list for the summer. We started going through all the different information just in case a spot opened up. My parents started going okay well it's this much money and we have to send you away. All these certain little things overtook everything else I suppose, because no matter how

much I danced it wasn't about how good I was or how good I wasn't, it was about the money and my parents. They were going through something completely different, so in a way I guess they couldn't really afford to send me. So it's like what do we do, send you and tap into your college money when nothing is guaranteed. In the end I did get accepted for the summer school but I did not go.

Megan auditioned again a few years later and like Sam and Piper was not accepted.

I auditioned again a year or two later for the summer school. We all, as a studio, went to the auditions and no one really got in. We'd auditioned with way more people than we had at the first one. There were a lot of really really good dancers. It's one of the ones where they were more strict, that's what they do. So to me walking in there with all those dancers was like they're not going to take you because your heart and soul is in dancing they're taking you for technique. Also I was older, they would have wanted me three years ago when I auditioned the first time because there's higher expectations when you get older.

Rites of passage. Living the Dream included rites of passage such as pointe shoes, tutus and dancing a pas de deux.

Pointe shoes. All five women spoke of their pointe shoes. What was further striking is when asked to bring in personally meaningful objects, four of the five women brought in their pointe shoes and the one who did not, spoke of wanting to bring them. The women's discussions of pointe shoes all involved telling a pointe shoe story, emphasizing the importance of pointe shoes, and reminiscing about starting pointe work. Taken together, their stories provided strong evidence that pointe shoes are an essential rite of passage for ballet dancers.

Pointe shoe story. The women that brought in pointe shoes had a story to share about the specific pair brought in. Megan brought a pair of pointe shoes that she had dyed for a performance.



Ella brought her pointe shoes that she bought while attending the professional ballet school. “I bought them from the shoe room at the ballet school. I did not dance in them while at ballet school, I do not think, it seems unlikely, I do not really remember”.



Sam brought in a pair of brand new pointe shoes that she had just recently received as a gift from her mother.

My reason behind bringing them is the fact that they are hardly worn. They are a perfectly good pair of point shoes and I have yet to beat them up and take a bunch of classes and perform with them. So to me it shows me that I don't do as much of that as I would like too. And the reason I have them is because I wanted to own a pair again. So they are in perfect condition, they could hang on my wall. So I don't need them or I don't

use them very much because I'm not training, they are just to have. These shoes are going to have a story to tell I'm sure in a few years.



Lily brought her first and last pairs of pointe shoes, both of which have special meaning to her.

I have my very first pair of pointe shoes that are all sort of worn out, my first pair was especially precious, and then I have the last pair of pointe shoes that I wore when I trained at the professional ballet school. They have my name and the name of the school on them and sort of hold the memory for me. I kept these two, but I think I wanted to save all my shoes but they got so ragged. They were turned into nothing but rags by the time I'd finished with them because I always broke them down and then wore them as soft shoes. So they never really were worth saving after that. But the last pair I hardly wore, so they're still in fairly good shape. I wore them a little bit; they are a little bit soft. I would die if I ever lost these I think. They are special to dancers, really special.



The importance of pointe shoes. Each of the women talked about why pointe shoes held such importance to them. Ella, who first used the term “rites of passage”, revealed that pointe shoes are “iconic” to ballerinas and a large part of the life of a ballerina.

Pointe shoes are a rite of passage for every ballerina. And I think that they represent everything that it means to be a ballerina; you are not a ballerina unless you can go on pointe. Every young ballet dancer wants pointe shoes. They are a huge part of a dancer’s life, you spend so much time preparing to be in them and you spend so much time in these things. Then there’s so much pain attached to them as well. We all want to be there, and once you get there you have to deal with the blisters and the bleeding and the calluses. I think we’ve all bled through our pointe shoes. So like pain and love.

Similar ideas were echoed in each of the other participants’ interviews.

Pointe shoes are special to dancers, really special. It was just everything I’ve always wanted to do, I always absolutely loved pointe work; there was absolutely nothing I liked more than being on pointe. To me it epitomized what being a ballerina was all about. It was painful, yes, but I just loved it, just loved it. My first pair was especially precious and my last pair was special because it was the last pair of point shoes that I wore when I trained at the ballet school. I would die if I ever lost them. Going on pointe was a dream and I did achieve that one. (Lily)

Getting into pointe shoes was a big one. It’s hard to explain to people who don’t understand the significance of them (point shoes). That’s what every two or three year old little girl wants, they want the pointe shoes. Then you work so hard to get those

pointe shoes and when you finally get them you hate them because they hurt. Now when you are our age you're like oh my first pointe shoes. They are everything that ballet is and to get that far is a big deal. (Piper)

I've always just loved pointe shoes, when I was a little kid and I watched ballet and ballerinas and that's all I wanted to do. I wanted to skip the regular soft shoes and I just wanted to go on pointe right away. To me, I looked at it like that's what makes you a real ballerina because the real ones the older ones that's what you see them wearing all the time. So to me it was like okay well this is a step in the direction of actually becoming a ballerina. Getting your first pair of pointe shoes is like oh my goodness like the real ballerinas. I kept probably every single pair of my shoes just because they are so meaningful. It's a reminder of something you can keep, for every pair you go through it's kind of like holy that was how much dancing and I think they're just really beautiful.

(Megan)

Although I didn't make it in the ballet world as far as I would have liked to I still find them an achievement type situation. I just remember there was a chosen few that got to do pointe and you were in the class with the ones who had gone to the summer programs and so I think that was a big thing for me. And then I had Signature Rehearsals by Bloc for my first pair and I destroyed them with my feet and my teacher was just so surprised. I remember her saying "um never thought your feet were that strong". I had broken the shank and we had to use shellac in my toes because they would go soft so quickly. So that was kind of a prove you wrong moment. They are definitely something I think that

has been kind of an accomplishment in the ballet world seeing that not everybody gets the chance. (Sam)

Reminiscing about starting pointe work. For all the women, talking about pointe shoes recalled memories of getting their first pair and starting pointe work. Ella described it as an “awesome day!”

Oh man, I remember being twelve or thirteen in the dance wear store and thinking that I’m really buying shoes. It was so exciting, and I remember going up on them for the first time and it didn’t hurt as much as I thought it was going to. They were so pretty and shiny and pink, I think I slept with them that night. I put them on and I was playing around in them I couldn’t wait to sew on the ribbons and learn how to tie a reef knot. I was practicing tying a reef knot before I got them. It was an awesome day.

Sam spoke of feeling “cool” and sophisticated.

I remember doing lots of barre lots and lots of barre and even then I still remember coming to class and being so pulled up and just loving having my hair slicked back and doing relevés and rises and pliés and I was okay with that. But it was just you felt so pulled together and if someone was watching, you felt so cool doing pointe. It didn’t matter how much younger the person was, if they’re watching, you pretended you knew what you’re doing when you’re actually about to break your ankle. It didn’t matter, if your toes were ripped open and bleeding inside your shoes, you felt cool.

For Lily, starting pointe work was the highlight of her youth.

You had to wait forever and then finally you got your pointe shoes. I am thinking I was twelve. First of all, we had a shoe company come to the school and they fitted everybody with shoes. That was the most exciting day of my life probably at that point, I was so excited. We were given our pointe shoes and then we were given sewing lessons on how to darn the toes. They had us do it with single thread and I think it took us about a month or two months to get our shoes darned. So we weren't on pointe until we got them darned and then our ribbons sewn on, we had to be instructed on all this. So finally the whole class got their shoes ready and then finally we actually got to go on pointe. They taught pointe very very gradually, so all we did was five ten minutes at the end of barre. I think for the first year I did nothing but rises and relevés two feet to two feet, but I never ever got a blister. I mean they hurt, it's painful, there's no question that pointe work hurts, but not in the way that your toes just get worn down before they're ready for it. We were trained very slowly and very carefully on pointe. So that's my memory of doing it for the first time, waiting forever to get those shoes ready.

Megan coveted pointe shoes since childhood.

When I started taking ballet, right away I wanted to go on pointe and my teachers were like well no you can't just do it. I'd always used to try on my teachers or just whoever's and try and dance around. So when my teacher finally said okay ya were going to do it and I got that first pair, I was so excited. I took them home and I pretty much slept with them on, it was crazy just because it was what I had wanted for so long. I think I was about twelve or thirteen when they finally said okay you can go on pointe. We didn't do

much the first year or two years but it was still exciting, I mean you're still getting to wear your shoes.

The idea of pointe shoes evoked vivid memories in Piper.

I remember it very clearly, I remember everything, I have pictures. I remember my teacher saying I need to talk to your mom it's time to go get pointe shoes. I remember the trip down there to get pointe shoes with my ballet teacher so clearly. I had an orthodontist appointment; I had my spacers put in for my braces so I was in a lot of pain. The dance wear store was just down the street and so I remember going and we met my teacher, she was a school teacher, and so she came on her lunch hour. I remember almost everything. I remember the ugly burgundy socks that they made us wear to try them on and my jean overalls. I remember trying them on. I remember the fact that the pair in the picture was not the pair that I bought and I remember everything about my pointe shoes. I remember what my teacher was wearing, mostly because it's in the picture, but I remember it all because it was at a lunch hour on a school day. It was pretty exciting and special. Every teacher will tell you keep your first pair of point shoes. They're a mess, they're darned and we made ours into soft blocks. They're a mess, but they've got all my rose petals crushed inside of them. I have almost every pair.

Pointe shoes embody so much meaning. Pointe shoes represent what it is to be ballerina. They are beautiful and shiny and every little ballet dancer dreams of the day that she will be strong enough to start pointe work and spends years working toward this milestone. Pointe shoes are a rite of passage into the ballet world. When it is finally time to begin pointe work, these young dancers are one step closer to becoming a real ballerina. Becoming strong enough to

begin pointe work is an accomplishment as not all dancers are able to do pointe work; therefore getting your first pair of pointe shoes is a “big deal.” However, pointe shoes are associated also with great pain. Thus ballet dancers have a love/hate relationship with their shoes. Most importantly, they are powerful keepsakes that hold many memories and stories from their time spent in the ballet world.

Tutus. Unlike pointe shoes, tutus were only brought up by three of the five participants: Ella, Megan and Lily. Ella talked about what a momentous moment it was to get her first tutu.

This tutu was made for me. It is just like when we talked about pointe shoes, this is another kind of rite of passage. At my school, there was a huge costume room that was fifteen years old and they recycled the same costumes over and over. We never had to make our own costumes. So the fact that they spent the money and the time, and holy cow, like how time intensive is it to have the tutu made for you. I think I had four fittings for this thing. I think there were twelve of us in this number, all the advanced students. We all had these tutus made for us, and we got called into the costume room individually. Everyone was super jealous because we got the tutus made for us. It was pretty neat. I don't remember much about the number, I just remember the tutu.

Megan revealed her first tutu was very important because it is what she associated it with a real ballerina.

Our first big tutu, we were all excited because that is a really big thing. Real ballerinas, when you watch them on stage they all have tutus. So to me it was like that's what real ballerinas look like, you wear a tutu you have your pointe shoes. Everything is a

milestone, if you can do a dance where you have that it's like you are being a real ballerina over just playing the role.

In contrast to Ella and Megan, Lily never got a chance to wear a tutu and talked about what that meant to her.

My dream was to wear a tutu and I never did. I've never worn a tutu, ever, which is desperately disappointing. That is my biggest regret and I just think that's not fair, dancing for sixteen years and never getting into a tutu, I never wore anything but a tunic. It's the ultimate ballerina, it's what I always wanted to be and never did become. And I think just that feeling of wearing a tutu, they do something to a body they makes you look so beautiful, makes your legs look so gorgeous.

Pas de deux. Ella was the only woman to talk about performing a pas de deux, and what it meant to her to be able to have a male dance partner.

I think that's another rite of passage, your first pas de deux and being able to do a pas de deux. I think I was the only person in my entire class through all of history with that class to have a pas de deux number on stage. So that was neat, nobody else got to do a pas de deux.

Immersion in the culture of ballet. Along with the story of how each woman tried to pursue their dream of being a professional ballerina and the rites of passage associated with living this dream, the women's interviews also offered insight into aspects of ballet culture.

Pressure. Ella talked about the pressure she felt while pursuing her dream to be a professional ballerina.

You are 16, 17 and you have made this life choice. I do not even remember making the choice; I just knew that was what I was going to do. And having to live up to the expectations of your dance teachers and parents and classmates even, that is a lot to be dealing with. At the same time my parents forced me to maintain a good academic average and if I did not get an 80 I would be in a lot of trouble, so there was a lot of pressure.

Self-discipline. All five women associated particular characteristics with ballet dancers. Self-discipline was an important one. Ella associated her level of self-discipline with an ability to handle high levels of pain.

I think I have a level of self-discipline that most people don't have. I can force myself to hurt myself in ways that a lot of people can't. I notice particularly with physical activity I can push myself harder than most people. Ballet is the least natural thing you can do with your body, people aren't meant to be one hundred and eighty degree turned out, they're really not meant to be as flexible or wrap their foot around their ear. It's pretty unnatural and it's pretty painful and pointe, it's just all about forcing yourself to persevere through pain.

Piper described her self-discipline as her ability to not give up. "You have to fight for things and not give up". Megan spoke of discipline as learning to do things even when you don't want to.

Ballet teaches you discipline, like you're going to do this and it's going to make you better. Just understanding that when you do something you hate doing and you don't get

why it's helping you, and then in the end you finally realize and you're like okay you know it was worth it. Especially when you are younger you don't understand, you're like why am I putting myself through this abuse and you don't get how it's going to help anything, but it helps everything. It's the first bout of tough love I've gotten from not my parents.

Dedication. Dedication to the art was also discussed. Lily talked of how incredibly dedicated ballet dancers have to be.

They are dedicated to the point of ridiculous. I think in a way it takes one to know one is kind of the feeling that I have about dancers. Unless you're a dancer you don't really know what the life is like, how dedicated you have to be, how hard you have to work and how much you have to push yourself to obtain what you want. Just because of all those things I think it takes a particularly kind of person to be a dancer.

The demanding nature of ballet meant that participating in other activities was not common. Ella talked about having solely one interest, ballet. "I had no outside interests. I spent my entire childhood being obsessed over one thing. I never had any other extracurricular activities at all". Like Ella, Sam did not have any other activities in her life growing up that were not dance-related.

By the time I was in grade six or seven I was at the studio for two or three hours per night of the week, it was definitely my life. Everybody else played volleyball or did basketball, I didn't have time. And then on top of that my other hobby was assisting.

Conversely, Megan did get involved in other activities growing up but they never lasted.

My parents tried to put me into stuff. They put me into ball one year and I don't remember liking it by any means, I never really wanted to go but all my friends were in it so I did it for a season. I remember being actually really angry because at one point we were playing ball and I had tripped in a gofer hole and sprained my ankle so I couldn't dance all of a sudden. So I was like okay this is screwing everything up and now I can't do anything. I tried at one point in Elementary to play volleyball, but you have to wake up early and be at the gym. I think I went like three or four times I'm like screw this I don't want to be on the team, it was just too much. Actually the other thing I was in was gymnastics and that I stuck to till about grade five, that was fun. So that was the only other thing that I stuck with. Other than that I didn't want to do any other sports, I was like no screw it it's not fun. I remember stopping gymnastics in grade five because I was dancing too much and the classes would be on the same days, so I had to start picking. When I got older it was just one of those last little extra things that I didn't have time for, dancing became way more important.

Piper was different than the rest of the women because she maintained involvement in activities other than ballet growing up.

It was mostly dance, but I played piano all the way through and that was a big thing, so that stuck. I grew up doing Irish dancing too. I quit when I was fourteen because I was doing a production for ballet and a production for Irish dancing and I was going to miss half of the Irish dance rehearsals, which was not a big deal I could handle them both, but

my Irish Dancing teacher said no you have to choose one or the other you can't do both and I said fine see you and I left.

Perfectionism. Perfectionism was also highlighted in the women's' narratives. Ella described perfectionism as a necessary component of ballet: "I think that ballet is one of hyper perfectionism. I am a perfectionist because you have to be". Piper also revealed how perfectionism is related to ballet.

You sit there and you stare at yourself in a mirror all day and you expect yourself to be able to do something right away, you have to always step back and try it again and again. It gets frustrating sometimes when you have a bad day and falling off a pirouette every time.

Lily saw a ballet dancer's life as the never-ending strive for perfection.

When you're in ballet class training to be a dancer it's always edged with that I'll never be perfect. You always want to be better than you are and you never feel that you can achieve perfection no matter how hard you try. It almost gives you a defeated feeling as well. So they're always striving for perfection that they never achieve, so it's almost an obsessive compulsive personality I think.

Sam thought her perfectionism preceded her dance training.

I'm such a perfectionist when it comes to little things and I'm sure I borderline OCD or something. I don't think it's because of dance but I think that dance really emphasized it. I'm so meticulous about things, when I'm cleaning a group I want everybody to be on.

It's things like that I think are brought out by dance, because you have to be so precise with certain things.

Ballet friends. The impact of ballet culture on social relationships were noted in all five narratives. Ella revealed that all of her friends growing up were dancers.

All of my friends were dancers because I went to a high school where there was a dance program. I had no social life; I only hung out with dancers. Dancers at the professional ballet school or in my dance program at home, were all in the same boat, it's all you have ever known when you are in a professional program. They have been dancing since they were three as well and that is the thing that holds you together.

Piper experienced a deeper level of friendship with her dance friends than with her school friends.

I only hung out with non-dance friends at school. My best friend who danced with us lived across the street and we lived outside of the city, so I mean we had neighbors but we very rarely played with them. It was just me and my friend, we played all the time and what else do you play but ballet. But I very rarely had sleep overs with friends from the city or anything. In high school all my friends were Ukrainian dancers so it was kind of the same.

Lily only had one good friend who was not at her ballet school.

I just had a best friend that lived not far from me and I really think that was about the extent of outside friends. Otherwise it was just school friends. There was not very much in the way of getting together outside of school, we didn't really do that.

Sam also talked about having more friends in the dance world.

A few of my dance friends went to the same school as me so it kind of carried over a bit. But for the most part I would say it was more so acquaintances outside of dance. It's a bond it really is, you're so attached through dance. Dancers just bond together, you have similar interests, you go through the same things, everything is relatable with them.

Megan's narrative revealed that she just did not have time for many friends outside of dance.

In Elementary School I'd go to school, after school I'd come home and eat, I'd go to dance for two or three hours and then go to bed. That was over and over four or five times a week. So I didn't really have much time for friends.

Injuries. Injury among ballet dancers was another aspect of ballet culture discussed by some of the women. Megan spoke of constantly battling sprained ankles. "I've sprained my ankles, both of them, way way too many times than someone should. It has stretched the ligaments on either side, so my ankles move in a really weird ways". Sam talked about her knees and hips.

My knees suck, absolutely suck, and I don't know if it's from trying to force the turnout after being told so many times, and even my hips. I also have a sciatic nerve issue that I can't lay flat on the ground.

Ella was also plagued by numerous injuries throughout her dancing career, but saw it as the cost of doing ballet.

I had tendinitis in my hips and knees, and my ankles were both really bad. Dancers are injured it is what they do; every dancer I know has dealt with injuries before.

Professional dancers, most of company are injured at any given time.

Competition. The level of competition and unkindness in the ballet world appeared in some of the women's stories. Ella disliked what she called "cattiness".

The cattiness that goes on between dancers makes it not conducive to friendship as far as I'm concerned. That whole environment is very backstabby. There are certain people in a class who are always going to be more able to get closer to perfection than others, so there's always that uber competitiveness between classmates. A lot of people can't get over that, despite the fact that you spend twenty hours a week together and a lot of that is sitting in the dressing room eating lunch together, and you're expected to be friends. I know that there were people who I think were really truly friends but it's so hard, it's not a supportive environment. It's so hard to truly get away from that competitiveness, especially if you are in a professional program, rec programs are one thing I think, but if you're all there to be professionals it's really different.

Megan also spoke of competition and unkindness during her training.

Lots of people used to say when I was a kid I was way too good, so I always danced with girls who were older than me by two or three years. It was rough because they used to always think I was showing off because I could do certain things that they couldn't do.

They used to be actually kind of mean to me, saying well you are just trying to show off,

making it so I didn't fit in. Sometimes it would suck, you know you get sad, but really I didn't care at the same time because I always wanted a challenge. I always wanted to be shown the hardest step and I wanted to try and learn it.

Being different. Ballet culture led to some of the women seeing themselves as different than non-dancers. Piper talked about how her dance life and normal life were different: "Things as a dancer you want in a normal life would be my wedding day, buying a house and having my first baby. That will be the things that are my normal life, the non-dance life". Similarly, Lily said:

I hated this ballerina kind of feeling that people put on me. I remember walking in to college and feeling really really nervous because I wasn't a normal person, I was a ballerina. I had been in this isolated world where everybody was a dancer and it's such a small world and it's so tight. It was almost like a nunnery where I went to school, although I did go home every day because I lived so close. But I really felt different from normal people and whenever I met Uncles or cousins or anything it was always "Oh you're the little ballerina" and I hated that so much. I was dying to be a normal person and it was actually quite a relief in a way to leave that ballet world. So I just remembered thinking I hope people can't tell that I am a dancer. I walked in that room and I just thought these are normal people. It was just such an odd feeling like you were different from everybody.

One of the benefits of quitting dance for Lily was becoming "normal". "It was empty and frightening (quitting dance) but also it was tempered again with my sunny side, this feeling of

now I can be a normal person...” Megan focused on having a different body than someone who had never danced.

I used to think about turnout. When you’re standing in front of somebody normal and you’re standing completely turned out, they try and they’re like my body does not turn that way, your body should not be like that. And then you’re like I guess not, hey this is just weird.

Losing the Dream

Losing the Dream is the story of realizing that one’s dream to be a ballerina would not be attained. What was interesting amongst the participants, was how long it took for them to acknowledge this reality. It was a gradual process for Piper, although she said that there were hints early on.

I knew early on I did not have the body type; I was always taller than everyone so I think that early on I realized that you know my hopes are pretty slim. But you can always hope that that will be overlooked because you are that good. I don’t think it was a sudden realization where no you are not going to be a ballerina, it was so gradual. I think I just clung to hope for a very long time. I failed Pre-El, and I think that the first fail you kind of realize that you’re not as good as you think you are. Then I got a really low mark on my Elementary, and seeing those who did well you sort of know that you’re not the best. Then I did my Intermediate in grade twelve and two girls passed and the rest of us failed, but I didn’t care. I had sort of made up my mind that I didn’t care what the mark was, I just wanted to have done it by the time I finished grade twelve. I never really let myself think I had failed because by then I already knew that I wasn’t going to be a dancer. I

think the first two failures kind of made me realize that becoming a professional ballerina would not happen for me. I think it was probably grade ten or eleven when I started realizing, but at that time I was starting to think about what I wanted to be when I grew up. I was thinking more about school and there was enough distraction between school activities too that it compensated for it, you let it go. So like I said, I think I always sort of suspected it so it was never really a big letdown but at the same time a little piece of you dies almost. I think part of your innocence goes away and you smarten up a little bit to the world.

Similar to Piper, Lily also had an inkling early on that her dream of dancing professionally would not happen, but it was a gradual process for her to fully acknowledged the truth.

It was pretty obvious pretty early on that I wasn't very good, and they didn't try very hard to convince me that I was. They pretty much told me you have got no turnout, your neck is too short and you're not working hard enough. So I kind of lost any ambition of ever making a career of it. Every year people get thrown out and every year I was waiting to be thrown out, and I never was. I could never believe, why do they keep me you know, because they really made me feel that I wasn't up to the standard. I always stood in the back row and at the beginning I used to get lots of corrections but then as time went by they stopped correcting me. So by the time I was 15, 16 years old I was totally convinced that I couldn't dance for anything, that this wasn't going to be for me. But I just loved going to class. When it was time to move on to the senior school, which was just pure dance it was no longer a school, they told me that they would accept me into the upper level school if I went into the teaching program but I wasn't accepted into the general school. The one really negative thing to me was there was nowhere else; if I couldn't

dance in their ballet company I couldn't dance anywhere. I knew that there were other ballet companies, but you just had this attitude that, well you have trained at this very prestigious ballet school so you were not going to dance with the festival ballet, you know, they are second rate. To me it was teach, and that was the option I was given. The teachers that I had were anything but role models. The teachers lived at the ballet school, taught all day long, they had no life, they were all spinsters, some of them were overweight and none of them had families. To me that was what being a ballet teacher was and the last thing in the world I wanted was to turn out like them. I wanted a family, I wanted to have children, I wanted to meet people, I wanted a life. So I said no way am I ever going to be a ballet teacher, and if I couldn't dance with their ballet company then I didn't want to dance because I didn't think there was anything else. So I quit, just cold turkey after dancing every day of my life till I was sixteen. It was just crazy.

Sam and Megan also expressed similar thoughts and feelings.

I didn't give up, but I think just gradually over the years there were different events that led up to where I just finally said you know what I'm just not cut out for it. First, I have no turnout. My friend was accepted full time at a ballet school when she was eleven and I remember her telling me one of the criteria for her being accepted was she had to work on her turnout. I just remember thinking she had turnout, she was great, she had a perfect little ballet body and so if she has to work on it I have no hope in hell, like my piece of pie is this big. Then there was the ballet solo situation. I hadn't done a ballet solo in probably five maybe six years because of the fact that I just felt that I didn't have the turnout compared to all these other girls. I just remember always feeling I just had to do either a demi-character or a character at the time because classical ballet I would get

my butt whipped, like absolutely kicked because they're all perfect and they have the perfect turnout, perfect lines and everything. Another event was not getting accepted to the ballet school. I think the first year I was not accepted to the ballet school was more of a blow for me, to be rejected when two of the people I went with were accepted and had all this fun and had a group of friends they kept in contact with. I wanted that so bad just for the social part of it, and for the training part of it, and to be able to say that I went to that ballet school, and to even own one of the body suits. The second year I went to the audition thinking I am going to do it this year. I still remember sitting on the floor in frog and her pushing my feet down and going oh my god my hips are breaking. Everybody else was sitting there and their feet were all tucked up and they're looking around smiling. I think that was one of the moments where I just went hmmm. I think that second letter when it was my mom who was more upset than I was I just realized you know this isn't obvious my calling in life. I think there were a couple little things along the line like those little incidents, and it clicks in eventually that it's not quite what you're cut out for. By the time I was thirteen maybe fourteen I came to realize that this might not work out as well as I was hoping. (Sam)

I think everything kind of went downhill from when I could not go away to ballet school because there was no money. I just coasted through dancing after that, I still kept it as a passion but I did more of everything else than ballet. I got more into tap and the things I originally started taking. I had kind of given up after the first audition saying okay we don't have the money to go, so the only reason I went to the second audition was because our teacher said that we should all go, so I went. When I was I think sixteen we'd gotten a really really good ballet teacher. I was going through being a teenager, high school, my

family life was getting really bad and actually clinical depression so to me it was a good thing to be in dancing because everything else seemed so crappy. I thought maybe a getaway would be to go away to a ballet school or try and dance again, and I remember asking her at one point what would I have to do to try and audition again and go away. She said well I need to see you every day for the next two years dancing and starting to train just to get ready for that. But I mean by that time I was well sixteen, I would have probably been eighteen by the time I went and auditioned and that's when they are taking people for the company not just whatever. So it was a thought and then it began to get put off. She ended up moving away and we had to get a new teacher anyway, so it all got thrown out the window. (Megan)

Ella's realization that she would never be a professional ballerina was more sudden than the rest of the women.

I was in physio at the professional ballet school already for tendinitis in my hips, and my knees and ankles were both really bad. So I was talking to the physios about the cost and my mom was always like "I don't know it's so expensive you know if you need to". I was always so cognoscente of us being not that well off and she always gave us the impression that we were poorer than we were. So I didn't feel I could make my parents pay for my physio, so instead I just decided to leave. I went back home and I took a month off to rehab and then kind of eased my way back into taking classes at my school that year. My mom got me to see an orthopedic surgeon; he told me you have to start thinking about university. I was 16 or 17 and I remember thinking screw you pal, like what do you know, I have been doing this my whole life like it's just you being a doctor thinking that people have to be healthy, this is just part of the job. It took me 3 or 4

months after that just constantly battling with it to realize that I could not do it anymore. I did summer school that year, I would have been seventeen in summer school so the summer after grade 11. My jazz teacher cut me from her number, and it was the only number I could actually do by that point. I remember thinking how much do you hate me, like you hate me so much and why would you do this. She cut me because she knew I was going to wreck myself but at the time I was fighting and just so angry. I think that was just the turning point, thinking like, I think I can do it but I am useless, like I can't do anything, what am I doing? I quit, that summer school was the last thing that I did. I did not even perform in the show that year. I quit because of injuries, I was forced to quit. It was the scariest thing telling my mom that I was not going to do it anymore. It was such a huge huge decision and I thought she was going to be really disappointed, of course she knew exactly what I was going through so it wasn't a surprise for her.

Life after the Dream

The last element of the framework is life after the dream, the piece of the women's stories that revealed how they transitioned to the life they lead today.

New relationships with dance. What was striking in this phase was three clear behaviours: continuing to dance, rejecting dance and ambivalence. For example, after Piper realized that her dream of dancing professionally would not be attained, she nevertheless continued to dance throughout high school, undergrad and graduate school. She also started teaching ballet.

After that, my dance focus shifted from not being a professional to still being able to dance but dancing for fun or recreation. And that was at the time when I transitioned into

assistant teaching. So it changed a little too, you were not heartbroken that you were not dancing anymore because you were not giving it all away, you were just giving it to someone else. That is how my dance teacher put it me. It was never really a question that I would go into university after high school. I started off wanting to be a doctor, but after about the second year I started taking classes in other areas. Through those classes I got interested in another area of study which led me to doing a Masters. I want to go on and get my PhD and possibly teach or work in a lab. I kept dancing a lot through university. I think it was just one of those things that once I was at university; dance was more of an escape than anything else because it was a chance that I did not have to study and I could just do one thing at a time. It was always career first dance second, but it was nice to have it there. Our studio was wonderful; they supported us entirely with getting an education because our tap, jazz and ballet teachers were all school teachers. So they realized career first, but they still let us dance and let us have it all that way, which was really nice. I danced competitively with my original group up until a year after I got married. I never felt that push to leave, after a while it was myself that was thinking you know I have kind of outgrown this and I wasn't learning as much. I felt like it was getting repetitive and so I switched to tap because it was new and hard and a challenge. I had always wanted to tap but because I was in everything else I never picked it up. I have been doing it now for three years. I am also teaching ballet and pointe. So it has changed a little, but I said from the time I was about twelve I am going to dance until someone tells me to stop. Whether that is my husband or a dance teacher or a doctor, someone has to tell me to stop. Ideally I would like to teach dance up until the point where I've finished my PhD because that gives me potentially eight more years. I would

like to do that because it's such a nice break from life and it keeps me involved in dance. I'm hoping that by the time I've got little girls I will just sort of phase into being a dance mom and never really leave. It may not mean that I dance on stage but I will still be there.

Like Piper, Sam never stopped dancing after she realized her dream would not be attained. She continued to dance throughout high school and the first part of her undergraduate studies. Today she also is a dance teacher.

It was a little bit tough I think, but once I finally got over it I went you know what I'm going to be good at my thing then. I kind of switched gears and did more so the whole package of dance not just ballet and pointe. After high school I was just focused on moving for University. I moved here in the fall and I started dancing at a local studio, I danced at the studio until I started dancing for a local dance company. I loved having a company to be part of, it fuels my energy and love for dance. I would love to still dance throughout my schooling. My goal for University was to get into physiotherapy. I spent so much time in physio because of my knees and sciatic pain; I thought well I could do this. I started on that path and I think I had it set in my mind that it was all going to work out and it would all be just dandy. I did two full years of a degree but it turns out that I don't like it so change of plans. I talked to someone and they said do what makes you happy and so I said you know you are right. First two years I had wanted to take a class from my current program of study so bad and it wouldn't fit into my degree schedule and I finally said I'm going to take it this summer for the hell of it. I got half way through it and went this is what I want to do. So I am actually doing the degree I want right now. So from here I want to continue with my education in this area. I am also a dance teacher

at two studios. I'm doing majority of ballet at both studios which I think is ironic that that's what I end up doing in the end. But it's great I'm loving it. I love teaching it's definitely the highlight of my week. I love teaching my kids because that gives me the opportunity to do what I love and to pass that on because I'm still doing what I want. I know that I am here for at least another year after this one just to finish my degree and I'm really hoping that both of these studios are going to be options till the end. I would love to continue working or going to school and teaching on the side. I know an older girl who is still following her dream of dancing professionally, so down the road I could still be trying to do what I want and it will be different it won't be a ballet career but I still could get my degree, continue teaching, and figure out ya I do want to dance professionally with a company. It's not going to be a ballet company, I won't be doing pointe, but if it's a contemporary one fine so be it I will be happy. But maybe I won't, maybe I'll just be doing my career and teaching on the side.

Megan, on the other hand, expressed more ambivalence. She too kept dancing after losing her dream, but quit a few years later, then went back to dancing in her final year of school, but then quit "for good" after graduation. Currently Megan is trying to find a way to let dance back in her life.

I continued to take ballet until my last couple of years of dance when we ended up getting this teacher that I did not like. I also needed to cut back on something cost wise and to me ballet seemed like the most logical. Everything else was just more fun and more relaxed and a lot easier to deal with, I didn't see tap as a career and I didn't really see jazz as a career per se. I've always been doing those for fun so that's what seemed easiest and they were the first things I started out with, I had been doing them longer than I did ballet

so I thought why not just stick with that, so I quit. When I was sixteen almost seventeen, in high school, I ended up getting a boyfriend and starting to cheerlead. I loved dancing but at the same time there was all this new stuff. I made a really weird decision to drop out of dancing and I quit. I quit for I guess probably a year. I went to the recital the year that I hadn't been dancing and totally bawled through the whole thing, watching everybody else and going I should be up there doing that. So I went back for the following year and danced again, but after graduating I dropped out because my parents didn't want to pay for dancing anymore. After high school I had gotten accepted into school. So I moved to a new city, stayed for only about a month, hated the city and came back. I thought about dance a lot, you never stop thinking about getting back into dancing and wanting to be there. But with trying to move out and all the other payments I was going to have there was no way to fit dancing in. So I just never got up the money to be able to get back into it. I worked when I came back home for a couple of years straight. I got a job trying to stay out of University I suppose. I just got so sick of working, not learning, I wanted to learn something so I thought okay I will apply for school. I kind of did it as more of a joke thing, and got in and I was like holly man dude I guess I am going to school. But it seemed like the right thing to do at that point because it's like I'm not going to get any younger I suppose. I am already almost twenty one and just starting University, which is already a couple of years behind. So it seemed like the right step to do it. I am interested in studying psychology. In high school I took a psychology class and everything was so interesting. I put everything together with being depressed and I realized well I'd gone through all that so why can't I help other people. I haven't signed up for school this year because of money issues but I'll probably end up

coming back and finishing my degree. Even though I'm not dancing, I plan on going back. I went and worked at my studio's recital this year and the whole time I kept thinking why am I backstage, I should be out there. I'm just trying to figure out how to get back and figure out okay well even though I am twenty there still has got to be ways to get your foot in the door again and figure out a way to make dance a career. Actually, I did a dance audition last week for a local dance group. I have not danced in probably two and a half years, actually danced and going to that audition it was like the first step in teasing myself back into wanting to do it. So now I'm in the mindset of I have to figure out a way to get back into it. It's not a choice now, it's like money okay that sucks but I've got to find a way to do it instead of just letting it be in the back of my mind. So no matter what it's one of those things I need to go back.

Lily's transition to life after dance took a much different road than Piper, Sam and Megan. Lily left the ballet world completely and took on a different life. It was not until many years later that she felt a pull to let ballet back in her life. Today, like Piper and Sam, Lily is a ballet teacher.

I had no clue what to do with my life, absolutely no idea. So my dad, being ever practical said you've got to learn to support yourself. In those days women were Air Hostesses, they were secretaries or they were nurses, and so I was going to be the secretary of course. So he shipped me off to College, where I took a two year course. I went through hundreds of different jobs. But not dancing, never touched it, in fact nobody even knew I was a dancer. It was like I was ashamed of it. It was like I was in denial that I had ever been a dancer, I didn't tell anyone. So I became a very normal person and I completely had never been a dancer, didn't tell anyone about it. I became a secretary and I learned to

do my office work. I met my husband fairly shortly after I had arrived here, didn't even tell him that I had been a dancer, and got married. I guess I kind of told him, I can't remember if it was before we were married or after but he thought I said I was a belly dancer. So it was strange, I just became a completely different person and the ballet world just didn't exist for me anymore. I think that was my way of dealing with it. So there wasn't a great sadness in it, I think the sadness came after much later. It was while I was just a stay at home mom, after I got married, if ever a ballet came I would go and watch. Sitting in the audience looking at that stage and watching dance, I couldn't wait, I was dying to get up and do a grand jeté, to do some chaînés tournes across the stage. It was unbearable to sit and watch it and not to do it. I thought oh god what have I done, you know, this is crazy, I still love ballet. So I guess I got over the whole being ashamed and being embarrassed by it and I was now more mature and a little bit older and able to deal with it. So, I just suddenly longed to get back into it. I started going to yoga classes and I loved doing it. So, I went through a little teaching course for yoga and started teaching yoga at the local school. And I loved it, I loved teaching children and thought I like teaching. So, the next step was I've got to get back into dance. So, I started looking around at dance schools and I found one that I really liked and so I started going there. I remember walking into that studio the first time, I had to go upstairs, I could hear a piano playing the piano music and that just made my heart fly, oh it was amazing, how could I have left this for so long. I went right back to square one, I relearned everything. There was a teaching training program I did alongside learning to get myself back into dance. I stayed there for a number of years and just knew that this is what I wanted to do. And then I moved. The first thing I did when I got here was look up the dance schools. I

found a dance school and it had a company attached to it. I knew this is where I wanted to be so I started going there and taking classes and it was fabulous. The teacher was just fabulous, but he didn't do any corrections, he never corrected anybody. So there were people with horrible technique and I couldn't stand it. I went up to him one day and I said "Do you think it would be helpful if I just went around and corrected people while you teach" and he said "oh no this is great, this is wonderful, yes you help me, you help me". So I started just being an assistant. I would just go and pull up the knees and turn out and drop the hips and get the feet to work. One day one of the instructors had to go off to a conference so I subbed her class for her. I think they were watching me and after the class they said to me "Would you like to teach for us?" I said "Yes I would love to". I started teaching, and I haven't looked back because I have been teaching ever since. I have been teaching here at my current studio for many years in addition to being in an administration position. My office training has come in so useful, managing and typing and keeping books and all that kind of thing. I love that. So I am living my absolute dream right now. I'm teaching dance which I totally love and I'm managing affairs which use my office skills. So I've sort of got the best of both worlds, so I've really have two jobs but they all fall into one. So it's all turned out amazingly well.

Like Lily, Ella also quit dancing and left the ballet world behind. It has only been within the last few years that Ella has found a way to let dance back in her life.

After High School I applied for college. I decided that psychology would be kind of cool, I wanted to be a Clinical Psychologist. I don't really know why psychology, I have not got a clue. Really, I think probably from TV. There was a part of me that wanted to be a physiotherapist as well. I had so much experience with physio, I could have done

physio with my eyes closed probably. But it was really competitive to get into that program at time, so I just decided that I would not go into physio, that I would do a Bachelor's of Science. But that is about all I kind of knew. I was a total loner in my undergrad. My circle of friends had totally disintegrated after dancing because the only thing that really held me to those people was dancing. So, I did not hang out with university people in my undergrad, I feel like I really miss out on that. I was struggling so much too, I was depressed. I think I lost a few years. I think I really started getting over it once I discovered the co-op program. I worked for a year as a research intern and I really enjoyed working there. I really felt like that was the beginning of when I finally started getting to be able to relate to people again. I talked to a lot of Clinical Psychology students and I decided that Forensic Clinical Psychology would be really cool, I was totally in to that. I went back to my University for my final year and I finished my degree up. In my last year the person who ran the co-op program was developing an evaluation of the program and she took students on as independent study students. I developed an evaluation framework for the student outcomes portion in this class and I really really enjoyed it. I remember really feeling a deep sense of accomplishment over what I had accomplished and thinking that this is really cool however, I still wanted to be a Clinical Psychologist. I applied for Clinical programs and I didn't get in to any of them. So, I worked for a couple of years. I was still on the Clinical route, so I wanted to give myself jobs that would be good for that. So, I started working for a group home company developing behavioural interventions. I burnt out so fast and I realized, you know what, if you do this you are going to be terrible at it. I really liked that program evaluation thing that I did in my last year of University so I thought maybe I would try that. I talked

to the women who ran the co-op program and she suggested a couple of places to look for jobs. She actually found me a job posting for a research consultant at a private research firm. They were not looking for a research assistant; they were looking for someone with a PhD who could take on consulting services. Somehow over the course of three or four interviews I managed to convince them to hire a research assistant instead. I really enjoyed it. I did it for two years and then I was getting to the point in the research assistantship where I was ready to become a project manager, not just a research assistant. So I thought grad school would be a great way to do that. That is how I ended up here. I am currently doing basically the job that I want to do and trying to finish up my thesis. As for dancing I will never take a ballet class ever again because it would be way to depressing. I don't think I would enjoy it. I went through a period where I could not even watch ballet because I couldn't deal (with it). It was not until I found pole dancing and gradually developed this awareness of dance outside of ballet or outside of formal dancing that I have become more comfortable with myself, and realize that I am still confident in some realm of dancing. So, I have come to terms with being a dancer again and it has become okay to kind of watch ballet again. I can appreciate it now instead of just sitting there and going what if that was me, that could be me, that could have been me up there.

Challenges. All five women encountered challenges as they embarked on their journey to a life after their dream, challenges that made this journey more difficult to navigate. A key challenge was the loss of identity. Ella solely identified as a ballerina so when her dream of dancing professionally was not attained she had a very difficult time.

I think it really was about identity. I was like, you took out ballet, like scooped it out of me threw it in the garbage and I had nothing left. I was like this hollow person who had no interests other than dancing. It was so part of my identity that it was not even that I had an identity as a dancer, I just did it. I was three years old when I started, so it was something that I just always had done, and I could not even conceive of myself as being something other than a dancer. It was my life; I had not known anything different.

Attending the professional ballet school further strengthened my identity as a dancer.

Like Ella, Piper and Megan lost an identity, however for them it was not their dancer identity but rather their child identity. Piper likened losing her dream to discovering that Santa Claus and Unicorns are make-believe.

I think that it is the same as finding out that there is no Santa or no Unicorns, when you realize that not everything is the way you want it to be and you might have to work a little harder to get what you want. I think it's also; innocence might not be the perfect word, naivety would be better. I mean every little girl thinks they are a ballerina and ya sometimes you get those kids that stand in the mirror and they still think they can be dancers and you have to be the one that has to tell them no sorry. I think part of your innocence goes away and you smarten up a little bit to the world.

Megan realized that life was not magical but hard.

Everybody says you can do anything you want to do and ya it's true but not necessarily in the way you want to do it. I don't know, when you're a kid everything is like butterflies and rainbows and you think that it's just going to be all magical when really there's not a whole lot of magic there. It was kind of my first crushing moment of realization that life

isn't just a huge fairy tale, just because you want to do something doesn't mean that you will get to do it.

Losing one's peer support system was also identified as a challenge. Sam found it difficult to adjust to losing her close friends when they went off to ballet school and she was left behind because she was not accepted.

You have your dance friends and you have your school friends and the dance ones are the ones you are closest with, so when half of them leave. So that was kind of tough, especially for that age. Three of the six or five of us were gone for sure for a summer, one of them ended up staying at the ballet school for the year and another one just came home and kept doing the summer ones. So that was kind of an adjustment to make.

Ella did not have any non-dance friends so when she stopped dancing her whole peer support system crumbled around her.

The ballet school was still integrated with the high school, so all of my friends were dancing still. They would talk about their show and their auditions and who got what part in the show and their rehearsal schedules, and I had nothing. So you have an entire group of friends who are dancers and nothing outside of that. So when I went to University, I was not dancing anymore, and my social network fell apart because I did not have any of these people in my life anymore because I was not dancing and the only thing that really held me to those people was dancing. It that was weird right, and that took a while, so that was part of my struggle.

Ella also had trouble making new friends once she started university.

I was a total loner in my undergrad. I'm shy around people I don't know, especially people I don't mesh with right away. I either mesh with you or I don't, if I don't mesh with you then I have no reason to talk to you. It's shy but it is that shy that comes across as being a snot. I was always really smart and a bit snotty so it's hard to make friends when you are smart and snotty. So I did not hang out with university people in my undergrad, I feel like I really missed out on that.

Another challenge faced by some of the women was not having other interests other than dance. Ella spoke of being at a loss because she had no other interests. "I didn't know what life could possibly even be because I never had any other extracurricular activities, I had no outside interests". Sam too faced difficulties because she did not have other interests in her life, as did Lily who described feeling "empty".

It was definitely my life. Everybody else played volleyball or basketball and I didn't have time because I was at the studio from four o'clock and you're there till eight or nine depending on how old you were. I was lost after high school. (Sam)

I danced every day of my life until I was sixteen, I started around six, so every day of my life I'm dancing and then this realization that it's over and I haven't got a clue in the world what I want to do. It was empty and frightening. I had no clue what to do with my life, absolutely no idea. (Lily)

Family difficulties were also seen as challenges in some of the women's stories. Megan thought her parents were not supportive at a time when she needed them the most.

It was tough getting over the ballet thing. I remember my parents being, well it's okay you wouldn't have wanted to move to another city anyways and we probably didn't have the money for it anyways, and they'd do the whole downer thing. My dad in particular, it was kind of bad because he didn't really understand the whole dancing thing. He knew I liked doing it but didn't understand that you could do it has a career. I remember at one point he said to me you know you are never going to make it anywhere big with your dancing, look at all your teachers right now, they didn't go anywhere, they are just teaching dancing and have to have a side job, so why would you spend all this money trying to go somewhere when you know it's not guaranteed and you're done by the time you are thirty.

Ella's relationship with her mom changed dramatically at the same time that she was having a difficult time over not attaining her dream.

I also had a giant fight with my mother in grade twelve, I stopped talking to her and I moved in with my dad. I actually didn't talk to my mom for about ten years after that, I have only recently in the last couple of years started talking to her again, so it was a giant fight. Everything kind of converged all at once my mom and quitting dancing. That year was a real mess.

Megan's story revealed how challenging it is when dance becomes a way of coping with life and then that mechanism is lost.

Growing up there was a lot of things that went on at home where dancing was my escape. When I went to dancing it was like I could get there and be super sad and start dancing and by the end of it it was like everything was gone, I totally forgot about it and I was in

such a good mood. So to me it was like a getaway and nothing else touched it as far as making me happy. Dancing is a way not only to deal with stuff but to keep distracted.

So it was hard not having dancing because whenever I didn't have it I found that's when I really thought about stuff.

Facilitators. Although the women experienced challenges during their transition to life after their dream, their stories also told of things that helped them through their transition. Social support was one such facilitator that all five women noted in their narratives.

Lily, Ella, Piper and Sam acknowledged family support. Ella remembered her father as a great support during her time after she quit dancing.

Getting through that grade 12 year my dad helped me, he knew I was having a really rough time. He kept me really focused on the future and where I was headed in that. We did all the applications for University, we figured out what I wanted to take in my first year and we talked about how I was going to get to campus. That was great. We got to be super goofy, we ate dinner in front of the T.V. and ordered pizza and made giant ice cream sundaes, that was super fun.

Sam found support in her whole family, but especially her mom.

My mom, I love my mom, I love her to death. Just going through being so upset and in the first place not even wanting me to be doing ballet and yet still supporting me to the max when I tried to do ballet. My mom was for sure the one that stepped in and was always encouraging me. She's always been the one to keep me in line and keep my head on straight, and ensured that I did not to get too wrapped up in the whole whatever it may be. She always kept me level and kept me focused on what's important, important that I

still loved to dance, important that I worked my hardest, important that I did what I was good at, not important because everybody else is doing it. It was nice to have that, at the time I'm sure I wanted to hear nothing of it and didn't want to listen to her, but now I'm so glad. She's just the best at that and she's always been so supportive, my dad too obviously, and my whole family has always been. But my mom's always the one that you count on for getting you through it and making you feel better and talking you in to being accepting of it. I think she's very good at doing that with me in particular; you got to try it; if it doesn't work you need to figure it out and refocus. That was definitely a big part of it. She was probably the biggest support system because it wasn't possible for my friends to be a support system, they were the ones going away and at the time those were the ones I was closest with, so it was definitely a family thing for sure.

Piper's parents kept her anchored.

I think they kind of let me mourn the loss, but they were always about keeping our heads level and our feet on the ground. So they would never let me fly high on things like that and they wouldn't let me get down about it. I think they always emphasized that there's more to life and school still had to be the priority.

Lily's husband helped her gain the confidence that she lost during her years at the ballet school.

“My husband had a huge role to play in that he totally gave me confidence in myself when I first met him”.

Piper also reported supportive dance teachers. Piper's dance teachers were role models who taught her that there is life outside of dance.

I think we all had really good attitudes because we had really great teachers. They had a professional career and then they taught dance, so we learned that dance isn't the end of the world and there's more to life.

Three participants talked about supportive peers. Piper found her ballet classmates to be helpful during her transition.

I had good classmates. We were very diverse and all had our own little specialties, but we all worked really well together. Not all of them wanted to be ballerinas, they were there because you had to take ballet to take jazz and tap. So I think seeing that they still enjoyed dancing helped.

Ella found that making new friends helped her.

I started dating my high school boyfriend in grade 12; he was new to the school. He had never known me as a dancer so that was helpful because he was not interacting with me as a dancer, he was interacting with me like a human being. He didn't know me when I had this crazy schedule, and for him it was normal to not have that crazy schedule. That was helpful to have someone who was normal to hang out with, who wasn't a dancer and didn't realize what I was missing, because he didn't know any better. That was good because it was like oh this is what normal people do and he is used to just hanging out or going for coffee or watching movies, watching T.V. I met my university friend between my first and second year and she had all these friends who were so the kind of people that I wanted to hang out with at that point in my life. They had intellectual discussions about

fascinating great stuff. So, intellectually I was having a really good time. I was going to university at the time and you start questioning things and thinking about stuff and being a critical thinker and it changed how I thought. This new group of people was really helpful in terms of learning to become someone who had outside interests. Graduate school and my last two years of my undergrad were the first time that I ever really felt that I clicked with people. They got me and they weren't afraid to debate, and they weren't afraid to have people disagree with them. I have always been fairly opinionated, but people can't deal with that if they are not like that. I feel that people that I know are really open to that sort of thing.

Megan found it helpful to be around other ballet dancers who were experiencing a similar process.

I didn't get accepted but neither did this other girl I went and did the audition with. So we were both in the same boat, and you kind of try and laugh about it and be like okay whatever you know brush it off it's totally fine.

Some women found it helpful to reframe their experience in a positive light. Piper started assisting her dance teacher around the time she realized her dream would not be attained. She found it helpful to think about her situation as passing on the torch to the new generation of hopeful dancers rather than being upset that she was not able to dance professionally.

That was at the time when I transitioned into teaching. So it changed a little too, you were not heartbroken that you were not dancing anymore because you were not giving it all away, you were just giving it to someone else. That is how my dance teacher put it to me.

Lily attributes learning from her experience for being able to successfully transition to a life without her dream.

I have had quite a few negative things that happened through my life, but they don't get me down. One of my favorite quotes is "people who are failures are people who have never tried to do anything, people who try and fail are not failures". You learn from your failures and you build on them and they are good for you and they make you a stronger and better person, it's the not trying that is the failing thing to do. So I've had failures but I am always optimistic and feel that it's probably for a reason, and that something better is probably the reason why that that didn't work, so something better will come along and it's always been that way. So I don't know if it's because I'm optimistic that things turned out, I think attitude has an awful lot to do with the way people's lives are and I think it's the way you're born. I've got a very sunny outlook on life and tend to see the silver lining around the clouds.

Another facilitator apparent in the stories was having more interests than just ballet. Piper was one of the only women that had more interests than ballet and found this helpful during the time she realized that she was not moving forward in the ballet world.

My parents had always told me you can't rely on dance forever so they had made sure I had options. In addition to dance I was also very involved in piano and Irish dancing. Although I did quit Irish dancing when I was 14, I played piano all the way through and that was a big thing, so that stuck. I never had a breakdown moment with ballet, but I think because you are concentrating on something and you are always focused on something you can't let one thing fall out of the way. So I think because I was always

pushing in piano that dance just got pushed right alongside it, because I wasn't allowed to dance unless I worked hard at school and in piano.

One woman found that participating in a ritual started the healing process. Lily found that participating in the yearly school tradition of throwing their berets in the lake on her last day was very helpful in moving forward.

The last day we had this tradition that was so fun and I think that it sort of brought it all together for me. We all had to wear a beret in school, on the last day of school we all went down to the lake we took our berets and we threw them into the lake. That was like me throwing away that part of my life and yet we were all having so much fun with it. It was so exciting because we all hated those hats so much. So it was a joyous moment and yet it kind of wrapped it all up. So that's the actual day I quit dancing.

Some women found dance, in one form or another, a facilitator in dealing with not becoming a professional ballerina. Sam found that continuing to dance helped her in a number of ways when she was dealing with losing her dream. It made her realize that she could be a more rounded dancer.

It was a little bit tough I think, but once I finally got over it I went well I'm going to be good at my thing then. It's still ballet but it's more I'm going to be good at everything then.

Through dancing Sam also learned to compensate for her lack of turnout, which had been an issue when she was pursuing her dream.

It's for sure the compensation part of it; I work with what I have. Because my turnout sucks I worked on my extension, so I can have my leg up here in a nice développé and it won't be completely turned out but that's okay. It's just kind of a work with what you got, so make it work. I love it; I absolutely love doing classical now, so it's nice. I love that I didn't give up on it; I found a way to make it work.

Sam also found that dance competitions helped her gain back her confidence in her dancing ability.

That was my big moment when I got to compete. I got to do solos and I didn't have to compete against any of the strong dancers because they were off at ballet school. It was nice to be able to go to the studio and when all of your strongest students aren't available to compete your next ones are the ones who look like the strongest ones.

Megan found that dancing for fun helped her after realizing she was not going to make ballet a career.

Giving up the whole ballet thing and my parents not being able to pay for it was really sad. One of the things that helped make it go by easier was throwing myself into the other types of dance. I looked at it like okay I can't go off to ballet school and I won't be able to make a career out of ballet clearly, but I can still dance for fun. You have two routes of dancing and if you can't do one you might as well do the other if you still like doing it. So even if I lose ballet at least I have the other types of dancing.

Lily, in stark comparison to Sam and Megan, found it helpful to walk away from ballet.

I never touched ballet; in fact nobody even knew I was a dancer. It was like I was ashamed of it and I was in denial that I had ever been a dancer. I just became a completely different person and the ballet world just didn't exist for me anymore. I think that was my way of dealing with it, I just buried it that was it and it was gone and it was no longer a part of my life, that was it.

Ella found that finding dance in other forms helped her complete her transition. "As I developed this awareness of dance outside of ballet or outside of formal dancing I became more comfortable with myself and realized that I am still confident in some realm of dancing".

Self-exploration was also seen as a facilitator during the transition to a life after losing the dream to become a professional ballerina. Ella was left with nothing when she realized her dream would not be attained. She found it helped to develop an understanding that there was more to life than just ballet and attending university helped her with this.

It was really about discovering what was out in the world and University was great for that. I was learning about Psychology, I was learning about Physics and Chemistry. I was learning about the scientific method and learning how to think and becoming a critical strong thinker and learning how to write properly. I was learning how to assimilate things and synthesize. I took Religious Studies courses; I took a class on Wicca and Witch Craft, I took a class on Daoism, I started a class on Kabbalah. So it was a great time for me to learn how to be well rounded or start to build the bones to that right. I think I was aware when I was in University of becoming someone differentish or

like I had potential in that area. I never had the chance to exercise those muscles before because it was always the dance muscles that were being exercised.

Another facilitator that appeared in the narratives was focusing on the future. Piper found focusing on the future made letting her dream go easier.

At that time I was starting to think about what I wanted to be when I grew up. I was thinking more about school and there was enough distraction between school activities too that it compensated for it, and I let my dream go.

Lily's excitement for the future helped her through the transition.

I was excited for the new chapter. I think I almost didn't think about giving up dancing too much. I think I was thinking more about what's going to happen next and what am I going to do with my life, just preparing for that. I was just too busy learning to be a normal person and learning a whole new set of skills and college life was something new for me. That took over completely, I didn't have time to feel depressed or mope or anything like that.

Correcting the past. Lily and Sam, who went on to teach dance, found that their experience growing up in the ballet world influenced the way they taught their students, giving them an opportunity to do some things differently. For example, while at ballet school Lily felt that she was not encouraged by her ballet teachers so she makes sure to give her students lots of encouragement.

I think I encourage everybody maybe too much. I'm a strong believer in everybody doing dance, even if they've got the worst body in the world and they can't do anything

that looks good. I feel that they've got every right to be in that class and if they can enjoy the movement I'm not going to judge what they look like. I'll try and make them the best they can be but it doesn't bother me. If they are not to the standard of everybody else I just say good on you keep dancing it's great.

Lily also places great importance on positive feedback.

I think the mark of a good teacher is when you are giving corrections you always try and counter the negative with something positive. Not every time, you don't need to always say you're wonderful, but in the general scheme of things I think you have to give some positive feedback to dancers.

Sam told a similar story.

I know what that was like, being the kid who couldn't quite get it and wasn't quite as good. I was the kid who the first kid would go down the room and the teacher would say great that was good and then I would go down the room and the teacher would say oh keep working just about. I'm so careful with all my students to make sure they're always encouraged no matter if they aren't doing it right it's a "that was way better good, good, good like try this it might help".

Because of Sam's experiences with having no turnout, her teaching style places a greater importance on having fun versus having the perfect ballet technique.

I like teaching somewhere that isn't necessarily about the technique, which I think reflects back on where I've come from. I love teaching that love for dance and the

creativity part of it and that everybody has an equal chance. You need to work with what you've got.

Finally because growing up Sam felt that she was treated differently than her fellow students, she makes sure that she gives attention to all of her students.

When I was younger, I always felt that I was the underdog. It was so nice to finally get my chance to shine and to show my teachers that you don't always have to focus on the student that is the strongest that year, and put all your focus and attention into the kid. Some of those kids stopped dancing; they didn't want to do it anymore from the pressure. So that keeps me in line for myself when I'm teaching if I have a kid that comes in and can't get it and is absolutely lost, because I remember being there.

Making Meaning

Each woman made meaning of their experience of transitioning to a life without the dream of becoming a professional ballerina. Interestingly, each woman rationalized their experience in some way. Lily decided that her ballet school accepted her and kept her on because she was a good academic student.

I have always wanted to go back and say "why did you accept me?" I often wondered, this may be crazy, but I felt that there was an academic standard that they had to meet for the board of education, because it was an academic school in addition to being a ballet school, it's where I took all my schooling. I kind of felt that maybe they kept me because I could do Math and French and English and I could get decent marks in them. And I kind of felt that maybe they kept me just because they had to say yes we meet national

standards, because I am sure it wasn't for my dancing. So, that's how I reasoned it to myself, that's how I justified the fact that I was kept on.

Ella's rationalization process involved trying to determine who should be blamed, and concluding it should be the ballet school, not herself, nor her mother.

There are people who deal with crazy injuries and do it properly and do it well and looking back objectively on it, it wasn't my responsibility to recognize that and to take myself out of the game. But I feel like probably I blame myself and that is where the regret comes in. So, I guess I do feel personally responsible for not becoming a pro despite the fact that I mean it's a pretty well documented history of medical problems but there are those, what ifs, right? What if I had looked after myself better and what if the injuries had been handled better, what if I had handled the injuries better? But really I should have had my mother, but moms are not equipped. There is no parenting class for dealing with a talented kid for anything, whether it is music or dancing or gymnastics; they don't teach parents how to deal with that. So, I don't know if it was really my mom's responsibility either. I think that ballet schools have a role, it's what they do they educate dancers and part of that is injury management. So, I guess I should probably be blaming, it is funny I start with myself and then go to my mother and really it should have been my ballet school.

Sam rationalized not being accepted to ballet school with not wanting to go anyways because she would have missed out on the fun she had at competitions.

I think that I would have been upset if I had gone to ballet school and missed out on all the competitions. It was so fun to go to competitions with our studio, stay in the hotel with all the girls and go hot tubbing, go for supper after the awards.

Piper rationalized not attaining her dream by telling herself that those who do dance professionally might not even be happy. “I often wonder if they really love it or if it becomes a job, you have to tour and do all the obligatory show up here and sign pointe shoes”. Megan rationalized not getting to go to the ballet school by saying that she would not have liked it.

I know someone who did the summer school and I think he did a couple years there, too. He ended up coming back and what he didn't like about it was he wasn't doing anything but ballet. We were both dancers where we did everything and I can't imagine not being able to tap dance and just focus on one thing. So, now when I think back I'm like holy crap I would have been probably really deprived of everything else because all you're doing is ballet. If I was doing that and got an injury and couldn't do tap anymore or something I would really be kicking myself like what did I just do, why did I let that happen?

Megan also concluded that dancing would not be a good career anyway.

You look at the ballerinas and some of them are about 35, they are going to be done probably in the next couple years and it's sad to say that or think that but that's the truth. You only have a window of however many years and you only have that if you don't get an injury. So it's one of those things what do you do after you are done? You haven't

really done any schooling because there's no way you could dance and be in university at the same time. So you have no other career, therefore you better have some sort of other interest or something you're good at. But I can just see it; you'd be a ballerina and then be done and try and find some regular people job. Say you get a receptionist job and people are like "oh what did you do before this", "well I was a famous ballerina", they'd be like "oh that's so cool" and you're like "ya it was". I can't imagine anything else would be that fulfilling, after you did something like that how would you do a normal job and feel like you want to wake up every day? You were doing the one thing you loved and then you couldn't do it anymore. It's probably really sad.

Three of the participants seemed happy with how their lives were turning out. Ella has accomplished a lot in her short life and is excited to see what the future holds.

When I was quitting dancing I would never have thought to hope for what I've accomplished already. I'm pretty young now, I'm twenty-nine and it makes me think what are the next ten years going to be like. I hope it keeps getting better. It's pretty exciting but it is really bizarre.

She believes she has a more well-rounded identity and is happy with the direction she is headed.

I now recognize it is like pieces have come into the puzzle, before it was academics and dancing; no other interests. Then I realized that social relationships could actually be fun, so I had a social life and I had a boyfriend. I was working and developing an identity in terms of career and having that in my life. Grad school really helped me realize that I do really want to be a well-balanced person. I want to have a relationship with my family that is good and maintained. I want to have exercise, and the best way for me to do that

is still dancing. I can be a dancer and not have to be a ballet dancer, and that was kind of the last piece of the puzzle. I want to be smart and have all of these things in my life. I want to enjoy my work, have a strong relationship with my boyfriend, have a good relationship with my family, have friends, and go out and enjoy food and wine and travel, and that I can be a dancer at the same time but in a different way. But it has been a ten year process. I still have some things where I am not balanced in. I work too much, but I just have to finish my thesis and then that will go away. It has been about identity formation I think and it took a really long time to figure it out.

Lily spoke of being extremely happy with her life and that she would not change anything.

My life has turned out so well. I've been so lucky that so much has gone right in it and it's all the events that have led me to where I am today. I am living my absolute dream right now. I'm teaching dance which I totally love and I'm managing affairs, which uses my office skills. So I've sort of got the best of both worlds, I've really have two jobs but they all fall into one. So it's all turned out amazingly well, but not thanks to anybody really, fate got me to where I am I think. I think back, would I have turned to anyone for help, I probably wouldn't. I think I just buried everything when I quit. I just totally didn't think of myself as a dancer even. So I don't think I would have gone to anyone and asked them what should I do. I really think in my situation I just would have done what I did, and it turned out to be the right decision. But I have always thought I've been born with a silver spoon in my mouth because things happen and they also seem to turn out well. So I'm just very very lucky.

Sam expressed similar sentiments.

I'm so glad that this is what I'm doing now, and in the end it probably will work out better this way. If I had gone to ballet school who knows where I would be, I don't know if I'd be hating it and would have moved on to an office job by now and never had a second thought about dance, or if I'd be dancing somewhere else. I don't know, but I'm so glad that this this is the way it worked out. So in the end it's definitely worth it, definitely worth getting over my first official goal slash dream of being a prima ballerina, definitely worth it.

Although Lily, Ella and Sam spoke of how happy they were with how their lives turned out two of the women communicated a different message. Although Piper seemed to be happy with her life, she never articulated it. Rather, she spoke of living out her dreams through her ballet students. "I always tell my girls that I am teaching, I am doing this because I wanted to be you and now I am living out my dreams through you". Piper also dreams of the time when she has a little girl who can take ballet.

I think every dancer has that time when they think they are going to be a dance mom. I think we sort of live out what we missed out on; we want to push that on our daughters. I think it's a natural transition, what ballerina doesn't want to grow up and have little girls who dance?

Similarly, Megan spoke of still wanting to find a way to dance professionally.

I still do want to make a career out of dancing. I still think if I really wanted to I can pick it up again, start training really hard, go to Vancouver, go somewhere, and audition for music videos or whatever. I watch stuff all the time, right now for some reason its Lady

Gaga and her videos are just so bizarre and weird. I think that it would be the funnest thing to dance and tour with someone or do something like that, because then at least you are traveling, you're dancing, you're getting experience doing something. I think it would be a lot of fun.

Summary of Results

Each of the women found their love of ballet in childhood and spent many years of hard work and dedication working towards attaining a performing career. Unfortunately, these women were unable to achieve their dream and had to make another kind of life for themselves. Through their stories, it was evident that coming to terms with not dancing professionally did not occur overnight, but rather, was a journey. This journey was plagued with challenges but also characterized by facilitators that eased their transition to their new life. This journey enabled these women to make discoveries about themselves and in the end they were able to look back upon their experiences with different meaning.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion

In this section the results from the present study are discussed within the context of the literature on career transitions of both professional and amateur ballet dancers. The framework of grief and mourning is considered as a means to further understanding the findings. The strengths and limitations of the study are discussed along with the implications for future research. In addition, implications for parents, dance teachers, school teachers, and counsellors are discussed.

Summary of Key Findings

Each of the five women experienced losing her dream to dance professionally and having to transition to a life without that dream. Their stories told of unique experiences highlighted with both similarities and differences. All of the women found ballet as a child, the difference lies in how they found their way. Piper and Megan found their own way and were put into dance because their love of dance showed at a very early age, whereas Lily, Ella and Sam were enrolled in ballet as a result of external factors. Each of the women auditioned for a professional ballet school at least once on their journey to achieve their dream of becoming a ballerina. However, Ella, Lily and Megan were the only women accepted and only Ella and Lily attended a professional school. Most of the women had inklings during their training that attaining their dream might not happen, whether it was not having the perfect ballet body or the inability to pay for high level instruction. But, the journey to accept the hard reality was a gradual process that occurred over several years. In stark comparison the realization for Ella came quite suddenly due to injury. After losing their dream, these five women took distinct journeys. Sam and Piper kept dancing after they realized that they were not going to become professional ballerinas. Both

are still dancing in some capacity today and are dance teachers. In comparison Lily and Ella stopped dancing completely and left the ballet world for many years. Lily did find her way back to ballet and is now a ballet teacher; however, Ella never looked back, and has since found enjoyment in an alternative form of dance. Megan's story was unique. She did keep dancing for a few years, but then she quit for a year or so, and then danced in her last year of high school, only to quit after graduation. Since then Megan has been trying to find a way to let dance back in her life.

Throughout their transition to a life after their dream, all of the women could identify challenges that made this time more difficult and facilitators that helped them along their journey. The challenges included losing one's identity, losing one's peer support system, lack of interests outside of dance, family difficulties and not having adequate coping mechanisms. In contrast these women found social support, positively reframing their experience, having interests other than dance, other forms of dance, self-exploration, participating in rituals and focusing on the future helped them on their journey.

Each of the women made meaning of their experience of wanting to become ballerinas but not being able to attain this dream and making another life for themselves. All of the women rationalized a way to make sense of losing their dream. Although they struggled to make sense of their experience, Ella, Lily and Sam were happy with how their lives turned out. Losing their dream was hard and they faced challenges while trying to make another life for themselves but they are content with their lives. Piper and Megan did not articulate this happiness for their lives. Although Piper knows that she will never dance professionally, she spoke of living out this dream through her dance students as well as her future children. Megan spoke of still

seeking a way to dance professionally, although she too also understands that it will not be a professional ballet career.

The women also articulated what it was like to be involved in ballet, painting a picture that the ballet world is a world of its own. There were rites of passage to this world that included pointe shoes, tutus and performing pas de deux. Once inducted, ballet dancers face great pressure trying to meet the expectations placed on them, which produces individuals that are self-disciplined, dedicated and perfectionists. An intense training schedule leaves little time for friends outside of dance as well as little time for exploring interests other than dance. The atmosphere was described as one of competition and unkindness among some of their fellow dancers. These women also faced injuries that affect them years after their intense training has stopped and most likely that they will live with them for the rest of their lives. Finally, most of the women spoke of seeing themselves as different than those outside this world, reiterating the idea that the world of ballet is a world of its own.

Understanding the Findings as a Process of Loss and Grief

The intensity and significance of this event in the participants' lives led me to consider their experiences as transitions through loss and grief. Worden's (2009) model of grief describes the mourning process as tasks to be completed rather than stages or phases to be moved through. This type of thinking emphasizes the idea that mourning is an active rather than a passive process, that one can take control and take action. This type of thinking also suggests that outside interventions can impact the mourning process. Worden (2009) defines four tasks of grief: to accept the reality of the loss, to process the pain of grief, to adjust to a world without the

deceased, and to find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life.

In the first stage, accepting the reality of the loss, one must come to the realization that the person is dead and will not be coming back (Worden, 2009). In regards to the present study, this task paralleled the women's realizations that their dream of becoming professional ballerinas would not be attained. For most of the women, this acknowledgement was a gradual process in which they had inklings early on in their training that their dream would not be attained; but, they nonetheless managed to keep these inklings at bay. Sam recounted a number of bumps along the way such as: not being accepted to ballet school, feeling that she would not do well in classical ballet categories, and having a lack of turnout. Together, these combined to make her realize that her dream was not going to happen. For Piper, it was the combination of her height, and not doing well on her major ballet exams that paved the way to her realization. Lily was told by her ballet teachers that she did not have the right body type for ballet and that she was not working hard enough. In addition, she was always placed in the back row and although in the beginning she was given many corrections, this attention and instruction faded over time. Lily waited year after year to not be asked back, which is ultimately what happened and cemented her realization. Megan's inklings started when she was accepted but did not go away to ballet school because of finances; however, the final realization came when she realized how many years of hard work it would take to get to the point of auditioning and getting accepted again. Only Ella experienced a more abrupt realization that happened in the matter of months rather than years. First, after leaving ballet school due to injuries, her doctor told her to start thinking about university. Second, after returning to her home dance studio, Ella's teacher cut her from a dance

number she felt she could still do. Together, these two incidents forced her to accept that she was too injured to dance and thus would not become a professional ballerina.

The second task of grief involves working through the pain of grief that accompanies the loss (Worden, 2009). Most of the women described talking through their pain and grief. Megan talked with a fellow dancer in a similar position; Sam talked with her mother; Ella talked with her father; and Piper talked with both her parents and dance teachers. On a different note, Lily's school ritual of throwing her beret in the pond powerfully symbolized the end of her dance career and helped her begin the new phase of her life.

According to Worden (2009), the third grief task is adjusting to a world in which the deceased is missing. There were many ways in which the women adjusted to life without their dream of becoming professional ballerinas. Ella made new non-dance friends. Others changed their relationship with dance, that is, they continued to dance, but with a different emphasis. For Piper, that meant moving away from training for a professional career to dancing for fun, and starting to teach. Sam started exploring other forms of dance, and she also began student teaching. Similarly Megan placed greater emphasis on dancing for fun and also focused on other forms of dance. However, Megan was ambivalent, continuing to dance after realizing her dream would not be attained, then quitting a few years later, then going back for a year, only to quit for good after graduating high school. Ella and Lily, on the other hand, completely severed their relationship with dance, walking away from the world of ballet. Finally, all of the women went on to obtain some level of secondary education not in the field of dance right after graduating high school, which was relatively soon after each of the women realized their dream of dancing professionally would not be attained.

The fourth grief task is to find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life (Worden, 2009). In this stage, the mourner must find ways to remember the deceased while moving on with their lives. In regards to the present study, all the women spoke of having keepsakes of their time training for a professional career. Such keepsakes included: pictures, report cards, competition medals, acceptance letters and information from professional ballet schools and pointe shoes. The women's pointe shoes was the most interesting keepsake discussed as it was the most treasured, embodied all that being a ballerina is, and held many memories of their time dancing. In addition Sam and Piper, who began student teaching in their teens, went on to become ballet teachers. Both of these women described wanting to pass on their love of ballet to their students. It is interesting to note that Lily, who is also a ballet teacher, originally wanted nothing to do with teaching dance after she realized her dream would not be attained. It was not until years later, after beginning to teach yoga, that she realized she wanted to teach dance. At the time of the interviews, just like Sam and Piper, Lily described passing on her love of ballet to her students.

Integration of Findings with Present Literature

There were both similarities and inconsistencies observed when comparing the current literature and the findings of the present study. A possible explanation for why the present study's findings were not reported in the literature is because of the methodology used. The present study focused on the women's stories and used semi-structured interviews, which allowed the women to tell their stories in whatever way they felt that it should be told. This allowed me to gather very personal and rich details that may not otherwise have been unearthed.

Dance

It is revealed in the literature that in order to be successful in the world of ballet one needs to have certain body type which is characterized by long legs, a short torso, arched feet, thin body, turnout and flexibility (Hamilton, 1998; Pickard & Bailey, 2009). Many of the women talked about not having this ideal ballet body which hurt them as they pursued their dream. Piper spoke of her height as she was too tall to be partnered with males, thus rendering her too tall to be a professional ballerina. Sam spoke about her lack of turnout and the issues that it caused her on her journey to pursue her dream. Finally, Lily talked about being told by her ballet teachers that she had no turnout and her neck was too short.

Ballet Dancers

The literature on the characteristics of ballet dancers mirrors what the women described as the culture of ballet. The women's stories and the literature note that ballet dancers begin their training in early childhood (Pickman, 1987; Pulinkala, 2011; Wainwright & Turner, 2004). Most of the women started dancing at the age of three although Lily and Sam started around five and six, which is the age cited in the literature. How these women came to ballet was also discussed in both the present study and the literature. Wulff (1998) described two ways that ballet dancers may find ballet; first parents may enroll their children because they notice them dancing around the house and second the children may ask to be enrolled usually because they have been exposed to ballet in some way. This was also seen in the findings but was described somewhat differently, suggesting that there were both external and internal motivations that led these women to finding ballet. The external motivation came from parents who wanted to dance themselves, teachers who saw promise in the area of dance and friends who danced thus igniting

the desire to imitate them. The internal motivations came from the women themselves and their intrinsic love of dance from a very early age, which lead their parents to enroll them in ballet class. Stinson et al. (1990) found that it was the mothers who enrolled their young daughters in their first dance class as was the case in the present study. It is interesting to note that many of the young dancers in the study conducted by Stinson et al. (1990) said that they disliked dancing in the beginning but unbeknownst to them it became an important part of their lives. Ella explained that her mother enrolled her in ballet to fulfill her own dream of dancing. Although Ella did not hate ballet she spoke of not being sure if she loved it. She had talent, so it was just assumed that she would make a career out of it. Whatever the reason behind starting to dance, it was at this time that these women discovered their dream to become professional ballerinas and their journey into the ballet world began. Lee (1988) described this journey as the process of acculturation.

It was noted in the literature that ballet training is intensive (Pulinkala, 2011; Wainwright & Turner, 2004), with those dancers who are serious about dancing professionally dedicating a large portion of their time to their training (Alter, 1997; Pickman, 1987). This is apparent in the women's stories as many of them spoke of spending long hours at the studio training. Megan talked about spending two to three hours a night, four to five nights a week at the dance studio. Sam also talked about spending two to three hours a night at the studio. In her narrative Lily talked about dancing seven days a week until she quit at the age of sixteen.

All five women discussed in their narratives that they socialized more with dancers than non-dancers. The ballet dancers' busy schedule was associated in the literature with taking away from time spent making non-dance friends (Buckroyd, 2001; Hamilton, 1998). Megan's narrative gives an example of this because after spending two to three hours four or five nights a

week at the studio she mentioned that she did not have much time for friends. The literature discussed dancers having a lot in common including the drive to be best which leads to competition among friends (Buckroyd, 2001; Hamilton, 1998; Stinson et al., 1990). The idea of competition was highlighted in the stories of both Ella and Megan, who stated that competition among dancers in their studios had a negative impact on them. However, Sam and Ella talked about the positives of having a lot in common with other dancers. Sam felt that the commonalities shared among dancers aided in forming a bond between dancers, which is why she considers her dance friends her good friends and those individuals outside of the dance world acquaintances. Ella described these commonalities as what holds dancers together. What was not discussed in the literature as a reason for ballet dancers associating more with other dancers than non-dancers was proximity. Ella spoke of attending a school that was affiliated with her ballet school and Lily attended a professional ballet school for the majority of her academic years. Therefore both girls were surrounded by dancers, leading them to develop friendships by default. The literature also discussed ballet dancers having a hard time making friends with non-dancers because they may be seen as different by non-dancers leading them to befriend other dancers (Buckroyd, 2001; Hamilton, 1998). It is interesting to note that the idea of ballet dancers being “different” from non-dancers was discussed among the women’s narratives, but not in the same context as in the literature. The women saw themselves as different from non-dancers, but did not associate their perceived differences with their lack of making friends outside the dance community. Piper discussed that her “normal” life and dance life were different. For example, things in her normal life, such as her wedding day, buying her first home and having children were not associated with her dance life. Megan talked about how as a dancer she could transform her body in ways that a non-dancer could not. Finally, Lily discussed entering her

non-dance life with trepidation because she had been living in isolation from those she considered “normal” individuals.

The literature discusses the idea that ballet dancers do not explore other possible occupations when they are training to become professional ballerinas (Pickman, 1987; Stinson et al., 1990). Support was found in some of the women’s narratives, but rather than talking about it in regards to occupations, the women discussed it in the context of interests. Pickman (1987) held that the dancers’ busy schedules are the reason why they do not explore other options for a career, which was evidenced in Sam’s statements about not being involved in any activities that were not dance related because of time limitations. Greben (2002) explained that those ballet dancers who want to dance professionally are very goal-directed from a young age, which leads to tunnel vision where most everything that is not dance related falls out of their scope. Ella is a wonderful example of this as she describes spending her childhood solely obsessed over one thing, ballet. There were also findings from the present study that refuted this suggestion. Two women did have other interests growing up. Megan was involved in baseball, volleyball, and gymnastics. It is interesting to note that although she was involved in these activities, dancing was always the most important to her. For example, when she gets injured playing baseball and not being able to dance, she quits baseball. If it hurt her ability to dance, it was not worth participating in. Another example of this is seen when she quits gymnastics because it demanded too much of her time and she chose to spend her time dancing. Piper was very involved in Irish Dancing and piano growing up. There was a point, similar to Megan, that she chose ballet over Irish dancing. However, Piper continued to be very involved with piano all the way through to adulthood.

It was mentioned in the literature that as a result of their intense involvement in the art, dancers tend to form their identity solely around dance (Pickman, 1987). This was supported through Ella's narrative, as she described herself as a dancer and she could not conceive of herself as anything other than a dancer. Hamilton (1998) explained that this dancer identity strengthens as time passes. This too was supported with Ella's story as she spoke of how attending the professional ballet school strengthened her identity as a dancer.

The literature suggests that many ballet dancers audition for professional schools but only a few are accepted (Hamilton, 1998). As per meeting the criteria to participate in the study all five women auditioned for a professional ballet school; however, only Ella, Lily and Megan were accepted. Megan did not attend due to financial constraints, and when she auditioned again a few years later, she was not accepted. Therefore, only Ella and Lily attended a professional ballet school. Lily described being elated that she was accepted because they accepted only a few people. Ella talked about how attending the ballet school was the pinnacle of her life. However, as can be seen from this study, attending a professional ballet school does not guarantee that one will dance professionally (Buckroyd, 2001; Wulff, 1998). Ella had to leave the ballet school due to injuries and Lily was not accepted into the upper level school.

Career Transitions of Professional Ballet Dancers

None of the women went on to become professional ballet dancers, but the literature on the career transitions of professional ballet dancers was found to have some parallels to the women's stories. Professional ballerinas retire for many reasons including deselection, change of interests, age, physical abilities, family priorities, injuries and redundancy (Roncaglia, 2006). In the present study, retirement was similar to not attaining the dream to dance professionally.

The findings from the present research showed that the women did not attain their dream of becoming professional ballerinas because of either deselection or injury.

Deselection according to Roncaglia (2006) “includes behavioural changes within fellow dancers, coaches, directors and ballet masters; little hints perceptively felt during casting, leading to a sense of slow exclusion from the group” (p. 188). Deselection was evident in the stories of Piper, Lily, Sam and Megan. Piper spoke of having an inkling early on that her dream would not be attained because of her height, but she clung to hope for many years. Piper was not accepted to either professional ballet school that she had auditioned for and did not achieve the marks that she wanted to in her upper level ballet exams, thus she started realizing in grade 10 or 11 that her dream would not be attained. Sam spoke of different events that led her to the realization that her dream of becoming a professional ballerina would not be attained. Sam had no turnout, which is essential for the ballet physique (Hamilton, 1998), she did not feel she was competitive in classical ballet categories because of her turnout, and finally she was not accepted to the professional ballet school either time she auditioned. So, by the time Sam was 13 or 14 she had come to the realization that what she dreamed of would not be attained. Megan was accepted to a professional ballet school, but was not able to attend due to financial issues, and this started her realization that her dream might not be attained. A few years later she auditioned again, but this time she was not accepted which even further strengthened this realization. It was not until she was 16 and approached her ballet teacher about auditioning a third time that she realized the length and intensity required meant her dream would not be attained. Lily’s experiences clearly exemplify Roncaglia’s (2006) definition of deselection. Lily’s teachers at the ballet school told her that her neck was too short, she had no turnout, and she was not working hard enough. Her teachers also did not give her any encouragement growing up and she was also placed in the

back row. Early in her training she was given corrections but as the time went on this stopped. However, each year she was asked back, which puzzled her because their behaviour made her feel that she could not dance. Her realization came to the forefront at the age of 16, when she was not asked to continue to the upper level school. Injury as a cause for retirement was found in Ella's narrative. Ella auditioned for a professional ballet school twice and was accepted both times. During her first summer school she broke her foot and was not able to attend for the year for which she was accepted into. Ella spoke of always dealing with injuries, but that this was the injury that started her demise. Ella was able to attend summer school the following year and was accepted to attend for the year. She mentioned that physically she had been declining since her foot fracture the previous summer, so by January or February she had to leave the ballet school due to injury. Ella returned home, completed rehabilitation, and started taking classes at her old studio. It took a visit to an orthopedic surgeon, who told her she better start thinking about university, and her dance teacher cutting her from a dance number, to realize that she was too injured to continue dancing. Ella was 17 when she realized that her dream of becoming a ballerina would not be attained because of her injuries.

Challenges. The women noted in their stories challenges that made giving up their dream difficult. There were similarities to the challenges faced by professional ballet dancers during their career transitions. Research has shown that retirement is not something many ballet dancers think about during their performing career; thus, many tend to ignore or deny they will eventually have to retire (Baumol et al., 2004; Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006; Roncaglia, 2006). Although not a specific challenge seen in the present study, this idea was touched on in some of the women's stories. Piper mentioned that although she knew from an early age that her chances of becoming a professional ballerina were slim because of her height, she put those

thoughts aside with the hopes that they would overlook her height because of how good she was. Similar denial was seen in Ella's narrative as she told the story about visiting the orthopedic surgeon. The surgeon told Ella that she should start thinking about university because of her injuries, however Ella disagreed. She spoke of dancing her whole life, and that dealing with injuries was just part of the job, which the doctor could not possibly understand. Ella mentioned that it took her three or four months to come to the realization that she would not dance anymore.

It was noted in the literature that ballet dancers do not explore other possible occupations because from an early age they are solely focused on dancing (Pickman, 1987). This poses a challenge when it comes time for these ballet dancers to retire, because they have little knowledge of careers other than dancing and lack the experience of exploring other options (Pickman, 1987). A similar challenge seen in the present study was not having interests other than dance, which made the transition to a life without their dream more difficult. Ella spoke of being solely occupied with dance; so, when it was time to move on to a different life for herself, she found it difficult because she could not even imagine a life that did not involve dancing. Sam talked about how dancing was her life growing up and when it came time, after high school, to choose a different direction she was at a loss as to what to do. After dedicating ten years to ballet, Lily spoke of not having a clue what to do with her life after leaving the dance world, which left her feeling empty and scared. Research has shown that although careers in the dance field are limited, some retired dancers find work in this area after they leave performing (Baumol et al., 2004, Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). What is interesting is that regardless of their post-performing career, many retired dancers were found to have done some level of teaching. This was also shown in the findings of the present study. Although all five women went on to pursue non-dance related fields, three of the five women are dance teachers. These positions are

not their sole career, as Piper and Sam are also full time students and hope to find employment in their field of study, with the possibility of teaching on the side and teaching ballet is only one component of Lily's career.

Another similar challenge seen both in the literature and in the findings from the present study was loss of identity upon leaving the dance world. Professional dancers define themselves solely through dance, therefore when they retire they give up what defines them and they lose their identity (Pickman, 1987; Wainwright & Turner, 2004). This loss of identity can be distressing (Greben, 1992). Ella's narrative clearly portrays this challenge as set forth by the literature. Ella described solely identifying herself as a dancer, and when her dream to dance professionally was not attained, she spoke being an empty person as if someone had scooped ballet out of her and threw it in the garbage. It was interesting to note that no one else spoke of losing this dancer identity, despite the sole dedication to the art that some of the other women spoke about. This could be due to Ella having to quit dancing as a result of injuries rather than being told that she was not good enough, as seen in the other women's stories, therefore robbed by "fate" not her personal limitations. However, Piper and Megan spoke of losing another type of identity, their child identity. Piper and Megan both talked about how children think that if they want something bad enough, they will get it; however, this is not correct. They both realized that just because they wanted to be ballerinas since they could walk, this did not mean it would happen, which opened their eyes to the "real" world and was associated with leaving behind the naivety of childhood.

The loss of peer support was also talked about in the literature and evidenced in the present study. According to Greben (1999), most of the friendships that dancers have are with individuals in the ballet company. Thus, when dancers retire from their performing career, those

friends are left behind as they leave the company (Gordon, 1983; Greben, 1987; Pickman, 1987). Sam spoke of having a tight knit group of girls she had danced with since she started ballet, whom she considered very dear friends. Many of those friends were accepted to professional ballet schools and went away for various lengths of time, while she was not accepted and thus stayed home. Sam found it difficult to lose half of her friends, and described it as an adjustment she had to make. Ella's high school was affiliated with her ballet school, so all her friends were dancers. When she stopped dancing she was still surrounded by her dance friends at school and she found this difficult because they would talk about their dance shows but she had nothing to contribute to the conversation. When Ella graduated from high school, she left behind all her friends because all that she had in common with them was dancing and she was not dancing anymore. She found it difficult to make friends during her first few years of university, so during this time she kept to herself and was alone.

There was a discussion in the literature that professional ballet dancers may experience feelings of anger, frustration and depression in regard to the losses they experience as they retire from their performing career (Pickman, 1987). This was not discussed in the present study's findings as a challenge; but, it was highlighted in one women's narrative. Ella spoke of having feelings of anger and depression on her journey to a life without her dream of dancing professionally. Another interesting point made in literature and the findings was the idea that the loss of a dance career is like a death that one needs to mourn (Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). This was not talked about in the present study as a challenge, but it was brought up in Piper's story. She talked about realizing that her dream would not be attained was like a little piece of her died.

There were challenges discussed in the literature on professional ballet dancers that did not appear in the women's stories. One such challenge of professional ballet dancers is because

of the intensity of their training and career; they do not have the time to pursue higher education (Greben, 1989; Hanna, 1988; Pulinkala, 2011). Therefore, after retirement many of these dancers will go back to school to receive the training for a second career (Gordon, 1983) which is expensive and time intensive (Baumol et al., 2004, Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). I think that this challenge was not discussed in the present study because by the time the women graduated from high school, they knew that they had to make another kind of life for themselves and all of them went on to some level of post-secondary education, either right after high school or a few years later. Therefore, this challenge faced by professional ballet dancers after retirement does not seem to be relevant to women who made an earlier exit from the ballet world.

Another challenge noted in the professional literature but not in the present study, was retiring professional ballet dancers find it difficult to adjust to new daily routines without their busy dance schedules as a result of their compulsion to dance and the decrease of physical activity (Wainwright & Turner, 2004). It is possible that this was not seen in the present study because Megan, Sam and Piper all continued to dance after realizing their dream to become a professional ballerina was not going to be attained. Therefore, there was not a dramatic change in their routine. However, both Lily and Ella stopped dancing so this challenge would be more relevant for them. Perhaps it was not discussed in Lily's story because she did not think about it when she quit dancing. However, later in her story she talks about finding yoga, so one can speculate that she found alternative forms of physical activity until she found her way back to ballet. In regards to Ella, she hinted at the physical activity aspect of this challenge in her story, but did not go into great detail. She quit dancing because of injuries and spoke of her injuries making other forms of exercise difficult. In addition, she spoke of her journey to find other

forms of exercise that she liked as much as dancing and her realization that for her the best form of exercise was still dancing.

The last challenge noted in the research literature but not in the women's stories, was many professional ballet dancers do not learn autonomy because they have been told what to do and how to think since a very early age, which leads to problems when they retire as there is no one to depend on and they must start think for themselves (Geben, 2002). One possible explanation for why this challenge was not seen in the women's stories is they made an earlier exit from the ballet world, and were not exposed to this way of thinking for as long as those who made a professional career in the ballet world. Another possible explanation is that a number of years had passed since the women in the present study were training for a ballet career; therefore, it might have been a more prominent issue at the time but as years have passed, it may no longer have been seen as necessary to discuss. It is also interesting to note that when the women talked about the culture of ballet, no one mentioned this aspect of the ballet world.

There were two challenges faced by the women in the present study that were not seen in the literature on professional ballet dancers' retirement. The present findings indicated that family difficulties made the transition to a life without their dream more challenging for two of the women. Megan talked about her parents and how they did not give the support she needed while she was giving up her dream. Ella spoke of having a huge fight with her mother that added more upset to an already emotional time as she was quitting dancing. Megan's narrative noted another challenge that was not discussed in the literature. In her story, Megan spoke of using dance as a way to cope with all the negative things going on her in her life and when she quit, she lost an important coping mechanism. These challenges are not faced solely by those who

were unable to pursue a professional ballet career, as professional ballerinas can experience family difficulties and the loss of coping mechanisms during retirement.

Facilitators. There were also similarities between facilitators faced by retiring professional ballet dancers transitioning to another career and facilitators that helped those who were unable to dance professionally. The age of retirement for most professional ballet dancers is around 30 years (Hamilton, 1998; Pickman, 1987; Roncaglia, 2006), which means that the dancers are still young enough to successfully change careers (Greben, 1999). This was not specifically talked about in the present study; however, the women were teenagers when they realized their dream would not be attained so one can assume that they were young enough to switch their life paths and move on in a different direction as is evident in each woman's stories.

Social support was shown to be a facilitator in both research conducted with professional ballet dancers (Baumol et al., 2004; Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006) and in the results of the present study. The extant research literature mentions various forms of social support available for professional ballet dancers including financial assistance, emotional support, counselling programs and services, job search preparation, advice and information, and assistance with education and training. Although this support was found to be given by dance companies, unions, service organizations, family, friends and dance transition centers, the most important source was family and friends. The form of social support that was found in the women's narratives solely comprised of emotional support given by family, peers and dance teachers. The findings from the research on professional ballet dancers and the present study highlight the importance of supportive family and friends when faced with going through a transition.

Self-exploration was also seen as a facilitator in the present study, and it was touched on in the literature. The literature discusses career counselling as an important mechanism for this self-exploration among the professional ballet dancer population to find other interests (Pickman, 1987). This self-exploration is seen in the findings through Ella's narrative. Rather than going to counselling, she found self-exploration through attending university, which helped her begin the journey to becoming a better-rounded individual with many interests.

In addition, both the literature on professional ballet dancers and the findings of the present study discuss the use of coping skills as a facilitator when transitioning to another kind of life. Research conducted by Roncaglia (2010) found dancers used denial, alienation, letting go, isolation, severance, acceptance, renegotiation and reconstruction to help them cope with retirement and transitioning to second careers. Almost all of the coping strategies discussed in Roncaglia (2010) were exemplified in the women's stories. Lily spoke directly of dealing with quitting ballet by denying that she was ever a dancer, she became what she thought was a normal person, moved on with her life, and never talked about it. Alienation was seen in Ella's story. After she quit dancing, Ella eventually stopped socializing with her dance friends. She spoke of having only dance in common with them, and when she quit dancing she lost that connection and had nothing to offer to the relationships. She also found it hard to be around girls who were still dancing, as she was struggling to deal with the fact that injuries forced her to quit. Both Lily's and Ella's stories show the use of severance to cope with losing their dream. After she was not accepted to the upper year school Lily quit ballet and moved on with her life in a completely different direction, and spoke of having nothing to do with ballet for many years. Similarly, after Ella quit she had nothing to do with ballet. She was not able to take any dance classes, listen to classical music or go to the ballet. Although today Ella can listen to classical music, attend

ballets and has found a new form of dance to participate in, she is still firm that she will never take another ballet class again because it would be too difficult. Acceptance was seen in the stories of Sam, Piper and Lily. Early in their training all three women had inklings that their dream of dancing professionally would not be attained, and thus the coming to terms with and accepting the reality was gradual process. All five of women's stories showed some form of renegotiating what it meant to them to be a dancer. For Sam, being a dancer changed considerably as it evolved from being a ballerina to becoming a better-rounded dancer who is good at all forms of dance, a dancer in a local dance company and a dance teacher. Megan's concept of herself as a dancer changed from being a ballerina to focusing on other forms of dance. Piper's concept of a dancer evolved from dancing at the professional level to dancing recreationally, and becoming a dance teacher. Although it took Ella many years to come to terms with being a dancer again, dancer to her changed from being a ballerina to being a pole dancer. Renegotiation is seen somewhat differently in Lily's story. She spoke of never feeling like a dancer growing up; but, today she sees herself as a dance teacher. Reconstruction was shown in Ella story as she spoke of gradually developing from an individual who solely identified as a dancer, to someone with multiple identities (e.g. daughter, sister, friend, girlfriend, traveler, employee and dancer). Just as mentioned in Roncaglia (2010), it may seem that the use of some of these coping mechanisms was counterproductive; however each served the purpose of helping these women deal with the loss of their dream over time.

The literature mentioned several facilitators that aided professional ballet dancers' transition to a second career, which were not part of the present study's findings. For example, professional ballet dancers learn many skills during their career that can be transferred to their second career. Such skills include attention to detail, perseverance, intense concentration and

determination, ability to evaluate themselves and make improvements, and the ability to take direction, and seek assistance from others when necessary (Pickman, 1987), self-discipline, team work, stamina, commitment, and loyalty (Baumol et al., 2004; Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). Ella briefly talked about how she felt the self-discipline that she acquired as a result of ballet has helped her motivation to do the work of her Master's degree. With this exception, none of the other women talked about how their ballet training has helped them in their journey of making another kind of life for themselves. These skills are also learned by those ballet dancers who do not go on to professional dance careers, so I found it is interesting that they were not discussed. One possibility is that they might not self-identify having these skills. I never specifically asked what skills they learned during their training, thus it is possible that if I had asked the women might have identified these skills as a facilitator on their journey.

Career counselling has been noted in the literature as essential for professional ballet dancers retiring from their performing career (Geben, 1999; Pickman, 1987). This form of support explores the dancers' readiness for retirement, aids in exploring other possible careers and highlights those skills learned throughout a dancer's career that can be transferred to a new career. As previously mentioned, the only source of support that was mentioned in the women's narratives was emotional and came from the women's family, peers and dance teachers. It is interesting to note that Lily mentioned that she would not have turned to anyone for help during her transition to a life after dance. Perhaps the other women, like Lily, were not interesting in seeking out help during this difficult time. Another possible explanation is that these women might not have identified that what they were going through could have been aided by career counselling. Finally, it also might be possible that these women were not aware of or did not have access to career counselling. Whatever the reason, career counselling was not utilized. I

think that it can be effective with those ballet dancers who had to give up on their dream to dance professionally. As seen in the present study, all the women spent many years dreaming of becoming a ballerina and spent a great deal of time trying to attain this dream. Talking to a career counsellor about giving up their dream and the associated feelings would be beneficial. Also, because most of the women in the study talked about being solely interested in ballet growing up, they were unsure what to do with their life when they realized they would not attain a ballet career. Career counselling could help these dancers explore other interests that either they were not aware of or did not have time to pursue because of dance. This might have helped them feel more confident in choosing an alternative life path. Finally, as previously mentioned, it would be helpful for those women to reflect upon their training and skills and explore how they can be used in their future endeavors.

There are also specific organizations noted in the literature that provide support for dancers that are transitioning out of a performing career (Baumol et al., 2004; Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). In Canada, this association is called The Dancer Transition Resource Centre (DTRC, 2008). Unfortunately, the sole purpose of The Dancer Transition Resource Centre is to provide services to professional dancers (DTRC, 2008); therefore, none of the women who participated in the present study would have been eligible for assistance. The Dancer Transition Resource Centre does put on a conference, held across Canada, which provides support for student dancers transitioning into performing careers (DTRC, 2008); however, the women in the present study would not have benefitted from this conference as none of them were going to transition into a performing career. As Hamilton (1998) mentioned, the earlier one starts thinking about retirement the better it is. Thus, while professional support services exist for

retiring professional dancers, no such services exist specifically for those dancers who are unable to attain a performing career.

There were also facilitators discussed in the women's stories that were not found in the literature on professional ballet dancers' career transitions. Some of the women in the present study found it helpful to reframe their experience in a more positive light. For example, Piper found it helpful to think of herself as passing on the torch to her ballet students rather than focusing on not being able to attain her dream of dancing professionally. Lily discussed her positive outlook on life, specifically feeling that when something negative happens it means that something great is right around the corner. Professional ballet dancers can also reframe their experience in a more positive light, therefore this is not a facilitator only faced by amateur ballet dancers.

It was found in the present study that having interests other than dance can be helpful following deselection. Piper was very involved in piano and other forms of dance growing up. Although she did quit Irish dancing, Piper continued with piano and obtained her qualifications to teach. She spoke of not having a breakdown about ballet because she had piano to focus on during the time she realized that her dreams of a performing career would not be attained. It is interesting to note that Piper is the only woman that was involved in the present study who talked about having other interests as a facilitator. In addition, this finding refutes research that shows that ballet dancers are solely focused on ballet (Pickman, 1987). One possible explanation is that Piper is an exception and that the majority of ballet dancers do not have other interests because they are solely focused on ballet and the pursuit of a performing career. Alternatively, one could suggest that Piper's lack of exclusive focus played a role in her deselection. Regardless, Piper's story provides evidence that ballet dancers can develop interests outside of dance, and that

having other interests helps in the transition after realizing that a professional ballet career is not attainable.

The present study found that participating in a ritual helped initiate the healing process. Lily spoke of the ballet school students' yearly ritual of throwing their berets in the lake on the last day of school. She found it to be a cathartic way to start her new life. This facilitator was not mentioned in the literature on professional ballet dancers. This is not a facilitator faced solely by the population understudy as retiring professional ballerinas can have rituals too.

Some of the women in the present study found dancing facilitated their transition to a life without their dream. Through continuing to dance Sam became a better-rounded dancer, learned to compensate for her lack of turnout and regained back the confidence lost during her training. Megan found that focusing on other forms of dancing helped her deal with not being able to attain a professional ballet career. In stark comparison to both Sam and Megan, Lily found it helpful to deal with not attaining her dream by completely walking away from ballet. Ella quit dancing for many years but found letting it back in her life helped her realize that she can still be a dancer, which helped her deal with her inability to dance professionally. I do not think that dancing as a facilitator is solely affiliated with those who made an earlier exit from the ballet world, since professional ballet dancers can cope with their retirement by continuing to dance or walking away as was shown in Lily's narrative. A possible explanation is that the professional ballet dancers did not identify that dancing helped them through their retirement and career transition.

The last facilitator identified in the present study but not in the literature on professional ballet dancers, was focusing on the future. Lily spoke of being excited about the new chapter in

her life and being too busy with preparing for the future to dwell on the fact that her dream to dance professionally was not attained. I think that professional ballet dancers can also use focusing on the future as a facilitator when dealing with transitioning to a second career, and therefore, there is nothing unique with its use by the population in the present study.

Unrealized Professional Performance Ballet Careers

The literature on ballet dancers who were unable to dance professionally is scarce. But Buckroyd (2000) discussed both the challenges and facilitators that dancers attending dance schools face as they realize that they are unable to pursue a performing career. This literature is more relevant to the women interviewed in the present study as both populations were amateur dancers who did not go on to attain professional dance careers.

Stinson et al. (1990) described the experiences of young student dancers and included a brief examination of giving up the dream to dance professionally, which parallels aspects of the stories in the present study. In their study, each dancer wanted to dance professionally but felt that they would not make it, thus they made the difficult decision to give up their dream. This is seen in the present study, as each of the women wanted to dance professionally but had experiences that prompted them to come to the realization that dancing at that level would not happen. They had to make another kind of life for themselves, which they too found difficult. The commonalties between the two populations support the idea that there are many amateur dancers who are unable to attain professional careers and must transition to a new career. It also supports the idea that more research needs to be done on the transition of amateur dancers, in order to better provide supports during this difficult time.

Challenges. Similar challenges were discussed in the research literature and in the women's stories. One such challenge was solely identifying with being a dancer (Buckroyd, 2000). This made it difficult for the dancers, because once they left ballet behind, they lost a key aspect of their identity. This is also a challenge for professional ballet dancers as they retire from their performing career (Greben, 1992; Pickman, 1987; Wainwright & Turner, 2004). Another similar challenge was dancers' lack of interests other than dance (Buckroyd, 2000; Pickman, 1987).

According to Buckroyd (2000), the realization that student dancers' dreams of becoming professional ballerinas are unattainable can leave them feeling foolish and useless, which can lead to depression and low self-esteem. This was also seen in the present study through Lily, Sam and Ella's stories. Lily spoke of gradually through the years becoming less confident in the realm of ballet, so by the time she was 16, the same year she quit, she felt she was not a good dancer. Sam called her dream to become a professional ballerina "stupid". When asked to clarify, she said that she meant that the dream was unrealistic, as there are many ballet dancers who share this dream but very few actually attain it. In Ella's narrative, she uses the words "useless" and "depression" when discussing her realization that she would not attain her dream of dancing professionally. She spoke of the time, after leaving the professional ballet school, when her jazz teacher cut her from the only dance that Ella felt that she could still do as a result of her injuries. After being cut, Ella discussed feeling useless and being unsure what to do next. As a result of quitting dance she spoke of being depressed and felt that she lost a few years as a result.

One last challenge identified in the student dancer literature is that because this population did not have a performing career, they cannot look back on the accomplishments in

their career to help them transition to a life after dance (Buckroyd, 2000). This was also seen in the present study as none of the women attained their dream of dancing professionally, and thus could not use what they accomplished in their career to help them transition to a life after their dream. Furthermore, Sam, Piper and Megan did not have attending a professional ballet school to look back on as an accomplishment as they transitioned to a life without their dream. It was apparent from Megan's interviews that she found this difficult.

It sucked in a way because it was one of those things where it probably would have skyrocketed something else. If I came back, even if I was not going to the company, at least you have that experience. You come back even after a summer with these experiences because everything is so intensive, you come back with an, I guess, a better knowledge. It's one of those things where you go and that's the make or break. Like you know if you want to be a ballerina or if you're like okay this is not for me, I'm just doing it for fun sort of. So to not have that, it's kind of harder because then you can't really figure it out on your own or it's harder to figure it out on your own. To say okay well do I want to keep trying for that and make this a career, or am I just going to keep doing this for fun and then decide later down the road.

There were challenges identified in the present study that were not talked about in the extant literature. Losing one's peer support system, family issues, the loss of coping mechanisms and feeling abnormal from peers were all seen as challenges in the present findings; but, have not been discussed in the literature on student dancers. I believe that these are challenges that can be faced by all ballet dancers, both amateur and professional, as they transition to a life without dance.

Facilitators. Just as in the literature on professional ballet dancers transitioning to new careers, facilitators were also seen in the literature on amateur dancers transitioning to a life after dance. There were some similarities seen between the amateur literature and the present study's findings. According to Buckroyd (2000), re-establishing one's identity is a facilitator for amateurs transitioning to a life after dance. The idea of re-establishing one's identity was discussed in the findings of the present study, but was not included as a facilitator. Rather, it was examined as a way of making meaning of giving up the dream to dance professionally. In Ella's narrative, she spoke of the 10-year journey she has taken to come to the realization that she is more than just a ballerina. However, she did not self-identify this process as a facilitator, rather she spoke of her new identities like she had just looked back upon her experience and made sense of it. It is interesting to note that re-establishing one's identity was not discussed in the literature on professional ballet dancers transitions to new careers. Although, the literature does discuss losing's one's identity as a result of leaving the dance world as a challenge during career transitions (Greben, 1992; Pickman, 1987; Wainwright & Turner, 2004). One reason for this omission is the authors assumed that the readers would make the conclusion that if losing's one's identity is a challenge then re-establishing it would be a facilitator.

Another facilitator found in both the literature on amateur dancers (Buckroyd, 2000) and the findings of the present study is exploring new directions in one's life. The literature describes this as returning to mainstream school or attending post-secondary education and exploring areas of interest (Buckroyd, 2000). Examples of this appeared in all of the women's narratives. Ella was the only woman in the study that left a professional ballet school and returned to mainstream education. All the women in the study did go on to attend post-secondary education. It took Piper and Sam a few programs of study before they found their calling, and at

the time of the last interview Megan had decided to take some time off school due to financial limitations. The story that truly highlights the positive affect of exploring new directions was Ella's. She discussed coming to university and discovering many new interests through the friendships that she made and the many different classes that she took. The literature on professional ballet dancers also discussed exploring other interests as a facilitator during their career transitions.

There were facilitators that were only talked about in the literature on amateur ballet dancers. For example, Buckroyd (2000) argued that amateur dancers need to mourn the losses that accompany giving up one's dream of a professional career, which includes the loss of their dream, the loss of structure in their life that dancing professionally would have provided, and the loss of identity. Although Piper briefly mentioned that not attaining her dream to dance professionally was like a little death and her parents gave her time to mourn this death, it was not thought to be talked about in the context of a facilitator. One reason why the women in the present study did not discuss the need to mourn as a facilitator for transitioning to a life without their dream is that they did not self-identify that this loss was one that was socially acceptable to mourn, with the exception of Piper. As observed in the literature, there are no professional support systems specifically for amateur dancers making an exit from the ballet world. This lack of support may leave the women in this population with the message "get over it", leading them to suffer in silence. The literature on professional ballet dancers transitioning to second careers also discusses the losses that dancers experience when they retire (Pickman, 1987); however, they discuss the supports that are in place to help these dancers mourn their losses (Baumol et al., 2004; DRTC, 2008; Greben, 1999; Jeffri, 2005; Jeffri & Throsby, 2006; Pickman, 1987). This

further supports the stance that the message conveyed to amateur ballet dancers is to “get over it” as they transition to a life without their dream.

Another facilitator discussed in the literature on amateur ballet dancers but not in the present study was preparing for the transition to life after dance while still training (Buckroyd, 2000). Hamilton (1998) also mentioned that professional ballet dancers should prepare for career transitions while still dancing, as the earlier one prepares, the smoother the transition to a second career. Although preparation has been talked about in the literature as a facilitator it is not thought to be realistic, as many professional ballet dancers ignore or deny the idea of retirement (Roncaglia, 2006). The concepts of ignoring and denial appeared in Ella’s and Piper’s stories, and therefore one possible explanation to why the women in the study did not prepare for not attaining their dream is because they did not want to think about the possibility of not dancing professionally.

There were also facilitators discussed in the findings of the present study that were not found in the literature on amateur ballet dancers. The women’s stories revealed that having some form of social support, participating in rituals, continuing to dance, leaving the dance world completely and focusing on the future helped them as they moved to a life without their dream of dancing professionally. I do not believe that these facilitators are restricted to the women in the present study. It is likely that amateur dancers can use social support, rituals, continuing to dance or leaving dance and focusing on the future as facilitators when they leave the professional school and have to make another kind of life for themselves.

The last facilitator seen in the present study, which was not discussed in the literature on amateur ballet dancers, was having interests other than ballet. It was only shown in Piper’s

narrative that having piano in her life helped her transition to a life without her dream. As previously mentioned, this refutes what has been found in the literature on professional and amateur dancers which suggests dancers focus exclusively on dance (Buckroyd, 2000; Pickman, 1987). Perhaps Piper is an exception and the majority of ballet dancers do not have other interests because they are solely focused on ballet and the pursuit of a performing career. However, her story does give evidence, despite how unusual it may be that ballet dancers will develop interests outside of dance, and that having other interests can help when making another kind of life for oneself after realizing that a professional ballet career is not attainable.

Correcting the Past

Lily and Sam, who went on to become dance teachers, spoke of being influenced by their own training experiences. Lily felt that her training lacked encouragement and positive feedback, both of which decreased her self-confidence. Now as a ballet teacher, she places great emphasis on encouragement and believes that if people want to dance then they should be able to and it is her job to make them into the best dancer they can be. She also feels that a mark of a good teacher is to provide dancers with positive feedback. Sam also talked about not feeling encouraged as a young dancer. She spoke about her lack of turnout and having difficulties with the emphasis on turnout throughout her training. Finally, she spoke of feeling like she was overlooked by her dance teachers and not given the same attention as those dancers the teachers saw as successful. As a result, she emphasizes encouraging all her students and does not single out those she deems the strongest dancers. She also places less emphasis on having the perfect technique and more on dancing for the love of dance. This action of “correcting the past” was not discussed in the literature on either amateur or professional dancers; however, I believe that amateur dancers making an earlier exit from ballet as well as professional ballet dancers can

meaningfully incorporate lessons learned from their training and careers into their teaching style, if they later become dance teachers.

Making Meaning

All of the women in the present study made meaning of being forced to transition to a life without their dream. Although each woman rationalized why they did not attain their dream, Lily, Ella and Sam spoke of how happy they are now with how their life turned out. I believe they have successfully transitioned into a life that excludes their dreams of dancing professionally. On the other hand, I believe the narratives of Piper and Megan tell a different story. On first glance, Piper seems happy with her life. She is furthering her education, still dancing, and teaching dance, which she really enjoys. However, she spoke of living out her dream of becoming a ballerina through her dance students and children, leading me to wonder if she has come to terms with not attaining her dream to become a ballerina and thus has not completely transitioned to a new life. Megan did not speak of how happy she is with how her life turned out; rather, she spoke on a number of occasions about how she still wants to find a way to dance professionally, leading me to conclude that she is still struggling to make a life without her dream. The idea that ballet dancers make meaning of their experience of transitioning to a life after dance was not discussed in either the literature on professional ballet dancers or amateur dancers, although I believe that these dancers do engage in a meaning-making process.

Pointe Shoes

The women were asked to bring in personally meaningful objects that represented their life while pursuing their dream and their life today. Although there was much variation between

the number and types of objects brought in by the women, almost all of the women brought in their pointe shoes revealing that pointe shoes are very meaningful to ballet dancers. The women's stories told how pointe shoes represent what it is to be ballerina. They are beautiful and shiny and every little ballet dancer dreams of the day that she will be strong enough to start pointe work. Years are spent working toward this milestone. Pointe shoes are a rite of passage into the ballet world, and when it is finally time to begin pointe work, young dancers are one step closer to becoming a real ballerina. Becoming strong enough to begin pointe work is seen as an accomplishment as not all dancers are able to; therefore getting your first pair of pointe shoes is momentous in the life of a ballet dancer. However, in addition to this love and excitement one has for her shoes, pointe shoes are associated with great pain thus ballet dancers have a love/hate relationship with their shoes. Most importantly, they are keepsakes that hold many memories and stories from the dancers' time spent in the ballet world.

I do not believe that this meaning given to pointe shoes by the women is unique; however, it was not discussed in the literature on professional dancers or amateur dancers. One possible explanation is that the literature reviewed for the present study focused on the topic of transitions and the methods used to gather data did not allow for the lived experience of the dancer to be presented.

Strengths of the Present Study

The literature on the amateur ballet dancers who dreamed of becoming professional ballerinas but were unable to, and therefore, had to make another kind of life for themselves is very limited. What information there is comes from psychotherapists working with dancers who are attending professional schools (Buckroyd, 2000). The present study included women who

attended professional ballet schools and women who auditioned for these schools but were not accepted, giving this study the benefit of hearing different voices and perspectives. The present study allowed the women to freely tell their stories of transitioning to a life without their dream, which adds the dancers' lived experience to the limited literature. In addition, the present study provides insight into other adolescents engaging in physical or artistic training at elite levels (Buckroyd, 2000). Therefore, in addition to adding to the literature on amateur ballet dancers' transition to life after dance, the findings of this study may also be extrapolated to individuals training at elite levels in other fields who are unable to reach professional status.

I believe that my personal experience with the phenomenon being studied, which I shared upon meeting the women, was a strength of this study. As a former ballet dancer, the women and I shared many things in common, which helped me gain their trust and make them feel comfortable speaking with me. Also I have experienced losing my dream and in turn making a new life for myself, which I believe made the women feel less vulnerable about telling me their stories as they knew we shared similar experiences. It is thought the women saw me less as a researcher peering into their lives but more like a fellow dancer sitting in the dressing room between classes telling stories. I believe this level of trust and interaction contributed to the honesty that the women gave me and improved the richness of the data.

I further believe that although not the focus of the study, the women experienced a therapeutic benefit in telling their story. Each woman upon completion of the last interview told me how she enjoyed participating in the study. Telling their story gave them the opportunity to sit down and really think about their experience and how it has shaped them as a person. It also provided the opportunity to bring back fond memories of the past and relive them during our conversations. Telling their stories also allowed them to make connections that before then lay

unrealized. The research interviews provided a forum to talk about their experience with the added benefit of talking with someone who had gone through the phenomenon. Telling their stories made them realize the opportunities they were given growing up and how thankful they are for that, as there are so many girls who want to be ballerinas, but are never given the chance to dance. Finally, participating in the study helped them further deal with and come to terms with issues that were previously ignored but as a result of this study were brought to the forefront.

Limitations of the Present Study

The homogeneity of the population may be considered a limitation. I hoped that placing recruitment materials at the provincial dance association, Pilates studio and a local dance wear store, in addition to the local university and college, would have attracted a more varied population; however, most of the women were Caucasian university students in their twenties from middle-class homes. Further research in this area should seek alternative establishments to place recruitment materials that could result in a more heterogeneous population such as dance studios, yoga studios, and gyms.

The interview style may also be viewed as having posed as a limitation to the study. Semi-structured interviews with questions developed from previous interviews were used so that the women would not be constricted in their story telling. Using this open-ended style of interviewing makes it impossible to touch on every point that is brought up by the women, so it is possible that in using this interview style valuable information was not followed up on.

Implications for Future Research

The literature on amateur ballet dancers' transition to life after dance is very limited and comprised of information gathered by psychotherapists working with dancers at dance schools. The present research was a rigorous study that provided the lived experience of amateur ballet dancers' transition to a life after their dream. In addition, the present study included both amateur ballet dancers that attended professional ballet school and those who auditioned but were not accepted or were unable to go.

The literature on this phenomenon is limited so more research is needed in general; however, the present study provides a basis for future research. I believe that male and female ballet dancers would have different experiences transitioning to a life without dance; thus, only females were chosen as the population to interview for the present study. However, it would be interesting to explore what the male ballet dancers experience with this phenomenon. Thus future research could repeat the present study with male participants.

An interesting finding that came out of the present study is that having interests other than ballet helps one as they transition to a life without their dream of becoming a ballerina. This was not found in either the literature on professional ballet dancers nor amateur dancers. Rather, the literature states that these dancers are solely focused on dance and do not have time nor drive to explore other interests (Buckroyd, 2000; Pickman, 1987). However, Buckroyd (2000) does explain that preparing for the transition to life without dance while still training would allow these dancers the time to explore other interests. Future research should explore why amateur ballet dancers do not explore other interests even though there is some evidence that it can be helpful when transitioning to a life without dance.

Each of the women mentioned that they felt they were different than non-dancers or not “normal” as compared to non-dancers. This idea was not reported in the literature on professional ballet dancers or the amateur dancers’ transitions to life after dance. It would be interesting to explore this idea further. If these dancers feel different than non-dancers, then maybe they should be looked at as different from non-dancers, which could ultimately impact the interventions used with this group.

Implications for Practice

The present study provided rich descriptions of what it is like for women who dreamed of becoming ballerinas but were unable to and had to make another kind of life for themselves. The women described many of the same challenges faced by professional ballet dancers during their career transitions, which demonstrates that this is a difficult time in the dancers’ lives. Although there are supports in place to help professional dancers negotiate post-career transitions, there are none for amateur ballet dancers making an earlier exit from the dance world. In addition, the women in the study saw themselves as different than their non-dancing peers, meaning they may have different needs in counselling than non-dancers. Therefore, future practice should focus on the development of counselling programs that are specifically suited for amateur dancers.

Since there is no specific association that provides support to these amateur ballet dancers dealing with transitions, it is important to provide support in places that are easily accessible to these dancers, such as at home, at the dance studio and in the school system. The present findings show that transitioning to a life without their dream to dance professionally can be a difficult time. When parents disregard these difficulties it can make this time more challenging. Therefore, it is important that these amateur ballet dancers’ parents are educated on this

phenomenon and provided with resources about where amateur dancers can get additional support in the community. The present study's findings showed that these dancers were spending most of their non-school time at the dance studio; therefore, it may be helpful to provide some level of support in the dance studios. It is unrealistic to think that every dance studio can employ a helping professional; however, the dance teachers can be educated on the losing the dream to dance professionally and be provided with resources that can help their students, as well a list of contact information for support in their community. Many dance teachers may have firsthand experience, which can be an added benefit for providing support to their students. Similarly, the studio could provide support to the parents by educating them on this phenomenon. When these dancers are not at the studio, they are at school, which is another place that support for this population can be provided. Within the school setting it is important to educate school counsellors as well as teachers. Teachers have daily direct contact with these amateur dancers and can be the first to notice the difficulties that they face. Therefore, teachers can be educated about the phenomenon and when it is appropriate to refer dancers to the school counsellor. School counselors should be provided with education on this population concerning the challenges faced and what can be done to help these dancers transition successfully. The findings from the present study showed that all the women did go on to receive some level of post-secondary education; therefore, this is another area that supports can be provided. Personal and career counsellors can be educated on this phenomenon and provide help to these dancers as they transition to a life without their dream. The last area that supports can be provided is helping professionals out in the community. Helping professionals should be educated on the challenges and facilitators that these individuals face as they transition to a life without their dream. It may be helpful to have helping professionals whose sole focus is to provide services

for amateur ballet dancers who dreamed of dancing professionally but were unable to and therefore had to make another kind of life for themselves.

One can look to the literature on amateur and professional dancers' transitions and the findings from the present study for developing supports for amateur ballet dancers. If possible, parents and ballet teachers should begin having conversations with amateur ballet dancers regarding the likelihood of attaining a professional ballet career early in their training, to start the preparation process. The present study's findings suggest that having other interests can help during the transition phase; therefore, it can be suggested that parents of these dancers put them into other activities and encourage the development of interests outside of dance. However, support may still be needed as these dancers transition to a new journey. Amateur dancers experience a number of losses when they leave the dance world including their dream, identity and peer support. These are all areas that helping professionals can explore when working with this population. Another area that may need to be addressed is the exploration of interests outside of dance, which can aid in the development of possible alternative career options. Finally, it is important for counsellors to help these dancers identify skills they have learned while training to become professional ballerinas that can be transferred to their new life.

Conclusion

As seen in the women's stories, not attaining ones' dream to dance professionally and having to make another kind of life for oneself is a difficult process. These amateur ballet dancers face many of the same challenges that professional dancers do as they transition to second careers including: not preparing for the end of their dance career, lack of exploring interests outside of ballet, the loss of identity, and the loss of peer support when they leave the

dance world. In addition, it has been found that supportive friends and family, and self-exploration are helpful to both professional and amateur ballet dancers during their difficult transition.

This group of dancers also is faced with challenges that solely affect those making an earlier exit from ballet. They have to cope with not attaining their dream and do not have career accomplishments that they can look back on to help them through the difficult transition. In addition, there are no specific supports in place to help these young dancers as they struggle with giving up their dream, lending itself to the idea that these young women should just “get over it” and move on.

Research on professional dancers has found that the transition process does not happen overnight; it takes time (Jeffri, 2005) and is a complex phenomenon (Roncaglia, 2008). The individual ballet dancers’ “circumstances, expectations, aspirations, fears, hopes, coping styles and support systems” (Roncaglia, 2008, Reflections and Conclusion Section, para. 2) will play a role in how they deal with career transitions. In addition, responses may vary not only between ballet dancers but also within dancers as they may react differently at different points in their journey (Roncaglia, 2008).

Taken together, not attaining a professional ballet career and having to make another kind of life for oneself is a difficult situation for a young dancer and more research is needed with this population in order to increase awareness and effectively develop supports that are specific to their situation and needs.

Postscript

This process has made me realize that I have never reflected upon my own experience of not attaining a professional ballet career and having to make another kind of life for myself. I have come to the conclusion that this is because I did not want to think about not attaining my dream and hoped that it would resolve itself. Therefore, being involved in this research brought up emotions that I never explored. I felt a great sadness at not attaining my dream. Also, I felt envious towards Lily and Ella because they made it farther in the ballet world than I did. However, talking to those women who were not accepted to ballet schools made me realize what I had accomplished.

At present I am still trying to figure out what this all means to me as I have never given myself permission to mourn the loss of my dream. I would like to get to a point where I can look back upon my experiences in the ballet world with appreciation rather than regret. Despite this I have learned a very important personal lesson from my experiences with each of the women: I have to find a way to let dance back in my life. Since this research process began I have explored many different dance avenues but I have yet to find one that can replace ballet, but I will continue to search.

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Appendix A: Call to Participate



**Have you ever dreamed of becoming a ballerina
but were unable to fulfill your dream?
Are you willing to share your stories
about transitioning to a life after dance?**



I am a graduate student in Educational Psychology and Special Education at the University of Saskatoon. Under the supervision of Dr. Jennifer Nicol (Registered Psychologist, Accredited Music Therapist) I am conducting a study focusing on the stories of females who wanted to be a professional ballet dancer but were unable to and therefore had to make another life for themselves. I am looking for volunteers to participate in 2 or 3- 1 hour interviews.

To be eligible for the study, you must meet the following criteria:

- (a) female
- (b) 18 years of age or older
- (c) a former ballet dancer
- (d) auditioned at least once for a professional ballet school
- (e) wanted to dance professionally, but were unable to realize this dream
- (f) struggled to navigate the transition to life after dance
- (g) feel you are currently living a meaningful satisfying life
- (h) currently motivated to reflect upon this experience

This study has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research

For more information, please contact

Tricia Wilson:

tjs410@mail.usask.ca

Appendix B: Telephone Screening

Hello,

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in the “Life after Dance: Stories of Women Transitioning to New Careers” research project. My name is Tricia Wilson and I am the student researcher on the project. I just want to begin by giving you some information about the study.

- The study is about the stories of women who wanted to become professional ballerinas, but were unable to, and had to transition to a life after dance.
- The study will involve two to three one hour interviews at the location and time of your convenience.
- The interviews will be fully tape recorded and transcribed, and after this process is completed you will be given the opportunity to make any changes you deem necessary.
- This study has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board. This process ensures that this study is based on ethical principles such that you can withdraw from the study at any time and your confidentiality will be protected to the best of our ability.

I just have a few more questions to ensure that you meet the criteria for participating in this study.

- ___ Are you female?
- ___ Are you 18 years of age or older?
- ___ Are you a former ballet dancer?
- ___ Have you auditioned at least once for a professional ballet school?
- ___ Did you want to dance professionally, but were unable to realize this dream?
- ___ Did you struggle to navigate the transition to life after dance?
- ___ Do you feel you are currently living a meaningful satisfying life?
- ___ Are you currently motivated to reflect upon this experience?

Meets the Criteria: Great, I would like to set up an appointment to hear about your story. What date and time is most convenient for you? Would you like to meet at the University of Saskatchewan or your home? Can I please get your contact information (email, phone and address) and the best time to contact you. I will be calling the day before our scheduled meeting to confirm. Thanks for your time and I look forward to meeting with you.

Does not Meet the Criteria: I am sorry, but you do not meet the criteria for participating in this study. Thank you so much for showing interest and contacting me for the study. If you are interested in the results of this study they will be available through the University of Saskatchewan Library website.

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

First Interview

Thank you for agreeing to share with me your story about transitioning to a life after dance. I want to remind you that you can withdraw from the study at any time and all data gathered will be destroyed. Please take as much time as you need while sharing your story and only share with which you feel comfortable. You can stop the tape at any time during the interview and you do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. I have some broad questions that will help guide the interview, however please feel free to add any additional information.

Question: I am interested in hearing your story about dancing and transitioning to a life after dance. I would like to begin by asking you what it meant to be a dancer? (Listening and probing with questions such as: How did dancing make you feel? Do you remember any particular sights, sounds and smells about your studio?) Can you please tell me about when you first realized that your dream of becoming a ballerina would not be attained? (Listening and probing with more questions such as: What happened next? How did your story end? etc.) Are there any particular stand-out moments as you think about your dream to be a ballerina, giving it up and then eventually replacing with another dream?

Checkout: Thank you for sharing your story today. Do you have any questions, concerns or additional comments about the interview today? I have a few handouts for you to take with you today. First, I have compiled a set of resources that you may find helpful or interesting. Second, if you know anyone that fits the criteria of this study I have a handout that you can give to them explaining the study and how to contact me if they want to participate or find out more information. For our next interview I would like to invite you to identify or bring any objects (pictures, costumes, dance shoes, prizes) that you feel represents your life of dance and any similar objects that represent your life after dance. Please try to not share any objects that include information that may identify other individuals.

Second Interview

Thank you for coming today. I just want to remind you that you can withdraw from the study at any time should you wish and all data gathered will be destroyed. Take as much time as you need while sharing your story and share only what you feel comfortable with. If there is a question you are not comfortable with you do not have to answer and the tape recorder can be turned off at anytime.

Question: Today, we will discuss your story as told in the first interview and engage in a discussion about specific themes that may have come up (e.g. identity barriers, facilitators and coping strategies). In the last interview you told me _____, can you please tell me a little bit more etc. Would you like to share with me any meaning objects related to your story?

Checkout: Thank you sharing your story with me. Do you have any questions or concerns about the interview today? Would you like to add anything? For our next interview I would like to invite you to identify or bring any objects (pictures, costumes, dance shoes, prizes) that you feel represents your life of dance or similar objects that represent your life after dance. Please try to not share any objects that include information that may identify other individuals.

Third Interview

Thank you for coming today. I just want to remind you that you can withdraw from the study at any time and all data gathered will be destroyed. Take as much time as you need while sharing your story and share only what you feel comfortable with. If there is a question you are not comfortable with you do not have to answer and the tape recorder can be turned off at anytime.

Question: Today, we will continue discuss your story as told in the first interview and engage in a discussion about specific themes that may have come up (e.g. identity barriers, facilitators and coping strategies). In the last interview you told me _____, can you please tell me a little bit more etc. Would you like to share with me any meaning objects related to your story?

Checkout: Thank you sharing your story with me. Do you have any questions or concerns about the interview today? Would you like to add anything?

Appendix D: Ethics Application

Behavioral Research Ethics Board

Application for Approval of Research Protocol

1. Name of Researcher

Dr. J. Nicol (RDPsych, MTA), Associate Professor, Educational Psychology & Special Education, University of Saskatchewan

1a. Name of Student

Tricia J. Wilson (M.Ed Candidate, BA), Educational Psychology & Special Education, University of Saskatchewan

1b. Anticipated start date of the research study (phase) and the expected completion date of the study (phase).

Start: March 2010

Finish: August 2011

2. Title of Study

Life after Dance: Stories of Women Transitioning to New Careers

3. Abstract

Preparing for a professional ballet dance career requires dedication, discipline and single-minded focus. But as training becomes increasingly competitive, many dancers must give up this aspiration and reinvent themselves for a life after dance. The transition is challenging given the identity loss and limited consideration of alternative careers. Although researchers have studied the transition to a post-dance life for professional ballet dancers, the transition of younger dancers remains unstudied. The goal of the proposed research will be to explore the experience and meaning of being an elite, female dancer who is unable to achieve a professional dancing career, and must make another life for herself. A qualitative study using Narrative Inquiry will be conducted. Three to five women who were former elite amateur ballet dancers will be asked to share their stories through two to three separate semi-structured interviews. They will also be asked to share personally meaningful objects which are relevant to their dancing career. The data will be analyzed using thematic analysis and represented in the form of the individuals' stories and photographs of the participants personally meaningful objects will also be incorporated. We anticipate that acquiring a detailed understanding about how particular women experience life after dance will help other dancers as well as inform adults in the world of elite dancing (e.g., ballet teachers, school teachers and counsellors).

4. Funding

The graduate student will fund the project.

5. **Expertise**

The population being studied is not above minimal risk.

6. **Conflict of Interest**

There is no perceived conflict of interest.

7. **Participants**

Posters (see Appendix A) will be placed around relevant institutions (e.g. University of Saskatchewan, SIAST, Dance Saskatchewan, Yoga Studios, dance studios and pilates studio) to recruit possible participants. The posters will contain information about the study, the criteria needed for inclusion and the student researcher's email address. The interested individuals can email the student researcher with their phone number and a convenient time that they can be reached. The phone call will consist of the researcher screening the possible participant with the criteria listed below (see Appendix B). The possible participants will also be given a chance to ask any questions they might have about the study. Interviews will be scheduled for those interested and willing participants who meet the participation criteria. At the commencement of the first interview, participants will be provided with a letter that they can pass on to friends they feel would fit the criteria for the study (see Appendix A). The letter will provide information about the study, the participation criteria and the student researcher's email address. Those interested individuals can contact the student researcher and give their phone number and a time at which they can be contacted. The researcher will screen the possible participants with the inclusion criteria listed below. Interviews will be scheduled for those individuals who are willing and interested to participate and meet the participation criteria.

To be eligible for participation, the participants will have to meet the following criteria:

- a) be female
- b) are 18 years of age or older
- c) be a former ballet dancer
- d) have auditioned at least once for a professional ballet school
- e) wanted to dance professionally, but was unable to realize this dream
- f) struggled to navigate the transition to life after dance
- g) feel like they are currently living a meaningful, satisfying life
- h) are currently motivated to reflect upon this experience

8. **Consent**

The informed consent form will follow the guidelines set forth by the Behavioural Research and Ethics Committee and include a statement informing the participants that the research was approved by the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research.

The student researcher will verbally go through the informed consent form with the participants and a hard copy will also be provided to ensure the understanding of the participant (see Appendix D). The participant will be asked if they understand the information and be given a chance to ask any questions. The participant will be asked to sign their name to verify that they have understood the given information and be provided with a copy of the informed consent form for their records. Participants will be explained

their right to withdraw from the study at any time with the no questions asked, during the informed consent process. Also, the participant will be reminded of their right to withdraw at the beginning of each interview.

9. Methods/Procedures

A qualitative study will be conducted using Narrative Inquiry, which focuses on the stories individuals tell about a certain phenomenon (Riessman, 2008). The data will be collected using 2 to 3 semi-structured interviews. The participants will be invited to share personally meaning objects that reflect both their dancing and post-dance life. In order to protect third party confidentiality, participants will be asked to share objects that do not identify other individuals. If the only option is objects that include identifying information, measures will be taken, such as blurring or blacking out names and faces, to protect third party confidentiality. The interviews will take place either at the home of the participant or at a research office on the University of Saskatchewan Campus, whatever is more convenient for the participant. The interviews will be approximately 60 to 90 minutes in length and will follow a previously determined general format (see Appendix C). The general format will allow a discussion about certain topics and themes for each participant, however each participant will have the freedom to bring other topics into the conversation as they see appropriate. In the first interview, participants will tell me the story of their transition to life after dance and there will also be a discussion of the shared objects. In the second and third interview there will be a discussion about the participant's story as told in the first interview and we will engage in a more analytical discussion (e.g., identifying barriers, facilitators, coping strategies), as well as a discussion about the shared objects. All interviews will be fully tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. The student researcher will take photographs of all shared personally meaningful objects brought by the participants. The participants will be informed of this prior to the interview process.

At the end of the first interview, arrangements will be made to schedule the second interview. At the beginning of the second interview, the participants will be presented with the transcript and summary of the first interview as well as the photographs of the shared objects. The participants will be given time to read over the material to ensure its accuracy and make any changes they see fit. If a third interview is deemed necessary, arrangements will be made at the end of the second interview. At the beginning of the third interview the participants will be provided with the transcript and summary of the second interview and photographs of the shared objects. They will be given the opportunity to look over the material to ensure its accuracy and be provided with the opportunity to make any corrections. A short meeting will be held to allow the participants to view the transcripts, summary and photographs of the shared objects from the third interview. The participants will be given the opportunity to read over the material to ensure its accuracy and make changes if they deem it necessary.

10. Storage of Data

All the data will be stored safely and retained by Dr. J. Nicol at the University of Saskatchewan for a minimum of five years as set by the University of Saskatchewan's guidelines. After this time the data will be destroyed.

11. Dissemination of Results

The results of this study will be used to complete the requirements for the degree of Masters in Education in School and Counselling Psychology and will be made available through the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education and the University of Saskatchewan library system. In addition, the results may be published, and/or presented at seminars and/or conferences. The results of this study will be made available to the participants at their request.

12. Risk, Benefits, and Deception

RISKS: The researchers do not anticipate any unusual risks and deception will not be used at any point in this study. It is possible that participating in the study may bring up negative feelings. Although, the participants must meet the criteria of (a) being motivated to reflect upon their experience and (b) feeling like they are currently living a meaningful, satisfying life, recalling memories may be distressing. I will be sensitive to participants' emotional state and continue interviews only with the agreement of the participant. A list of follow up support resources will be made available to all participants at the beginning of the study (see Appendix H).

BENEFITS: Talking about their experience of transitioning to a life after dance may help the participants gain a new found understanding of their experience. Also, the findings may help other female ballet dancers and inform parents, teachers and counsellors about the impact of transitioning to a life after dance.

13. Confidentiality

To protect the participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms chosen by the participants will be used in place of their real names. The documents signed by the participants will be kept separate from the transcripts, summaries, photographs of personally meaningful objects and audio tapes to ensure the participants cannot be identified by their responses. The participants will have the opportunity to review transcripts and summaries, and photographs of objects from the interviews to ensure accuracy and make any corrections that they see fit. Excerpts, quotations and photographs of personally meaningful objects will be included in the final document, however no identifying information will be used. The material collected during the study will only be made available to the student researcher, research supervisor and committee member.

14. Data/Transcript Release

Throughout the research process the participants will be given the opportunity to view the transcripts, summaries and photographs of personally meaningful objects to ensure accuracy and make any changes they see fit. During the final meeting the participants will be provided with a transcript release form (see Appendix E) and a photograph release form (see Appendix F) to sign, giving the student researcher permission to use the material gathered in the interviews.

15. Debriefing and Feedback

During the final meeting the participants will verbally debriefed and presented with a debriefing form (see Appendix G). This form will provide the purpose of the study and contact information to obtain more information about the study or a copy of the results

16. Required Signatures

*Tricia J. Wilson, M.Ed Candidate
Department of Educational psychology and Special Education
College of Education, University of Saskatchewan*

*Dr. J. Nicol, Supervisor
Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education
College of Education, University of Saskatchewan*

*Dr. D. Mykota, Department Head
Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education
College of Education, University of Saskatchewan*

17. Required Contact Information

Tricia J. Wilson
25-103 Banyan Cres.
Saskatoon, SK
S7V 1G2
Phone: 306-974-4985
Email: tjs410@usask.ca

Dr. Jennifer Nicol
28 Campus Drive
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, SK
S7N 0X1
Phone: 306-966-5261
Email: jaj.nicol@usask.ca
Fax: 306-7719

Dr. David Mykota
28 Campus Drive
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, SK
S7N 0X1
Phone: 306-966-5258
Email: david.mykota@usask.ca
Fax: 306-966-7719

Appendix E: Ethics Approval



UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Jennifer J. Nicol

DEPARTMENT
Educational Psychology and Special Education

BEH#
10-33

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CONDUCTED
University of Saskatchewan

STUDENT RESEARCHERS
Tricia J Wilson

SPONSOR
UNFUNDED

TITLE
Life after Dance: Stories of Women Transitioning to New Careers

ORIGINAL REVIEW DATE
09-Feb-2010

APPROVAL ON
15-Mar-2010

APPROVAL OF:
Ethics Application
Consent Protocol

EXPIRY DATE
14-Mar-2011

Full Board Meeting

Date of Full Board Meeting:

Delegated Review


CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: http://www.usask.ca/research/ethics_review/


John Rigby, Chair
University of Saskatchewan
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Please send all correspondence to:

Research Ethics Office
University of Saskatchewan
Box 5000 RPO University, 1602-110 Gymnasium Place
Saskatoon SK S7N 4J8

Appendix F: Informed Consent Form

You have volunteered to participate in a study entitled “Life after Dance: Stories of Women Transitioning to New Careers”. This consent form will outline pertinent information about the study regarding the purpose and procedures, potential risks and benefits, issues of confidentiality, data storage, your right to withdraw from the study and ask all questions that you might have.

Researchers: Tricia J. Wilson, M.Ed Candidate (email: tjs410@usask.ca) & Dr. Jennifer Nicol (Thesis supervisor). Department of Educational Psychology & Special Education, University of Saskatchewan (email jajnicol@usask.ca, phone: 966-5261).

Purpose and Procedure: The purpose of the study will be to focus on the stories of women who wanted to become professional ballerinas but were unable to, and therefore had to transition into another career. You will be asked to participate in two or three one hour interviews. During the first interview you will be asked to tell the story of your transition to a life after dance. In the second interview we will discuss your story, as told in the first interview, and engage in a discussion about specific themes that may have come up (eg. identifying barriers, facilitators and coping strategies). If necessary there will be a third interview in which we will continue are discussion from the second interview. I will also invite you to identify and share personally meaningful objects (e.g., photos, clothing, certificates and prizes) that represent your life of dance as well as other similar objects that represent your life after dance. Please try to not share any objects that include information that may identify other individuals. The interviews will take place either at the University of Saskatchewan or at your home, and at a time when it is most convenient for you. Interviews will be fully tape recorded, transcribed and summarized.

Potential Risks: The risks to participating in this study are minimal. However, there is a possibility that participating may bring up negative feelings. If negative feelings surface you will be given the opportunity to end or continue with the interview. Your participation in this study is voluntary, you can refuse to answer any questions you wish and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. In addition you have the right to request that the tape recorder be turned off at any point during the interview. Follow up resources will be made available to all participants at the first interview.

Potential Benefits: It is hoped that by telling your story and reflecting upon the meaning you have placed on your experience that you will gain a new found understanding of you transition to a life after dance. Participating in this study may also help other ballet dancers with the transition phase as well as inform adults involved in the world of elite dancing (e.g. parents, ballet instructors, school teachers and helping professionals).

Confidentiality: To ensure that your confidentiality is protected all audiotapes, transcripts and photographs will be available only to the student researcher and thesis committee members. Throughout the study these materials will be stored in a safe place by the researching student. Throughout the process, and in the final document, your real name will be replaced with a pseudonym and identifying information will be minimized in order to protect your identity. Once the transcription phase is complete you will have the opportunity to read and make any changes you feel are necessary to protect your anonymity, or for accuracy.

Storage of Data: All data collected will be stored, by the student researcher, in a locked filing cabinet during the study. At the completion of the study these materials will be stored in Dr. Jennifer Nicol's office at the University of Saskatchewan in a locked filing cabinet for five years.

Right to Withdraw: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any point you wish. You also have the right to not answer questions and to request that the tape recorder be turned off at any point during the interview. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all data gathered during the process will be destroyed.

Questions: If you have any questions, you may contact Dr. Jennifer Nicol or myself at the contact information provided. This study has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board (date of approval). If you have any questions regarding Ethical issues, you can contact the Office of Research Services (966-2084). If you are living outside of Saskatoon you may call the Office of Research Services collect. The results of this study may be obtained by contacting myself or Dr. Jennifer Nicol.

Consent to Participate: I have read and understood all information provided in this handout. I have been provided the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. With the understanding that I can withdraw at any time, I consent to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form for my personal records.

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Researcher)

(Date)

Appendix G: Transcript Release Form

I, _____, have reviewed the complete interview transcripts and the summaries of the interviews for the “Life after Dance: Stories of Women Transitioning to New Careers” study, and have been given the opportunity to make changes. I acknowledge that both the transcripts and summaries are accurate representations of what I said during my interview with Tricia Wilson. I hereby authorize the release of the transcripts to Tricia Wilson to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcripts Release Form for my records.

Participant

Date

Researcher

Date

Appendix H: Photograph Release Form

I, _____, have reviewed the photographs for the “Life after Dance: Stories of Women Transitioning to New Careers” study. I hereby authorize the release of the photographs to Tricia Wilson to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of this Photograph Release Form for my records.

Participant

Date

Researcher

Date

Appendix I: Debriefing Form

Thank you for participating in the “Life after Dance: Stories of Women Transitioning to New Careers” research study. Your participation and cooperation was greatly appreciated. The purpose of this study was to describe the stories of women who wanted to become professional ballerinas but were unable to, and therefore had to develop another kind of life for themselves.

If you would like more information about the study or like a copy of the results please contact:

Tricia Wilson
979-1329
tsandham@shaw.ca

or

Dr. Jennifer Nicol
966-5261
jajnicol@usask.ca

Appendix J: Resource List

Saskatoon Crisis Intervention Service

24 hours
933-6200

Dance Saskatchewan

www.dancesask.com
(Provides information about dance in Saskatchewan)

Dancer Transition Resource Centre (DTRC)

www.dtrc.ca
(The DTRC is a Canadian resource centre that helps dancers transition into, within and from a professional performing career)

Sasknetwork

www.sasknetwork.ca
(Provides information about career resources in Saskatchewan)

University of Saskatchewan Employment and Career Development

<http://students.usask.ca/support/employment/>
(Provides career resources)

Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIASST) Student Employment Services

<http://www.gosiasst.com/stuservices/employment.shtml>
(Provides information about career resources)