

A Golden Thread: Holding Up Identity in a Professional Dancers' Career Transition

Introduction and Research Question

The salience of embodiment can be explained in terms of the relationship that pertains between the body/self and time (Watson in Phoenix et al, 2007). Dance is a short career, therefore issues of retirement, retraining and ageing present important and persistent questions about vocations and identities (Turner and Wainwright, 2003). In relation to this topic I return to a quote that has previously resonated with me, and one that informs the following discussion. This essay aims to explore the topic of dancer identity and retirement both from a theoretical and self-reflective angle.

Dance, with its components of strength, endurance, flexibility, psychology, emotion, and artistic expression, is like the unraised ship until it is pulled into order by the 'string' of human spirit. The various quantitative and qualitative components exist, simultaneously distinct and yet integral to the whole, until the individual finds his or her own string to pull them together. (Chmelar and Fitt, 1991/2, p. 92)

With reference to the above quote, the aim here is to consider from the perspective of retirement from professional dance the nature and fragility of that 'string' or thread and to contemplate what it might be attached to in relation its severance. The word 'spirit' may in one sense be used to illustrate the enthusiasm, energy and bravery (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 2011) required from a professional dancer. 'Spirit' may also be used to describe the non-physical part of a person, which is "the seat of emotions and character, the soul" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2011). Notions of character and their relationship to occupation fall within the psychological construct of identity and its associated theories.

Athletic identity has been defined as "the degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role" (Webb et al., 1998, p. 2). From this, the question arises: how does the training and performance career of a professional dancer contribute to form an identity that is in its nature unique from sport, and why might this make it especially difficult to disconnect from dance as a profession? Chmelar's list of 'components' will provide the framework for discussing these questions relating to concepts of identity formation. Severance from dance will be addressed through the construct of loss: a trilogy structure of loss will be proposed.

There are significant limitations to this topic; studies, examining what might facilitate or hinder self - identity formation, are rare (Lavalley & Robinson, 2006). The substantial gap in the literature supports the rationale for research in this area. Therefore, the most appropriate approach to address this topic was applying self-reflection to the academic literature that exists. There will be no dispassionate third person voice, nor will this be a confessional tale, but delivered by *impressionistic* means for the purpose of bringing together my personal knowledge with the theory (Van Maanen, in Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

"How can we know the dancer from the dance?" W.B. Yeats¹

Regarding the concept of identity it is my foremost intention to deconstruct the 'components' listed in the Chmelar and Fitt (1991/2, p. 92) quotation, to consider where they might be "simultaneously distinct but integral to the whole". These variables form the framework of the discussion, working towards reconstructing a new understanding of their relevance to this topic. Interviews are also used to illustrate the potential similarities and differences to theories within existing sports literature. Identity theories and studies underpin the discussion.

¹ cited in Levine, 2004, p.1

Three components informing dancer identity can be determined. Firstly, engaging in dance activity develops the physical components of strength, endurance and flexibility (Koutedakis & Sharp, 1999) within a discipline that focuses on aesthetic values glorifying the body; the body being the valued medium of the manifestation. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that the body, its physicality, could be a key factor in forming a dancer's identity. Secondly, Wainwright et al (2005, p.9) contentiously state that, "Ballet requires emotional performing bodies in order to come into existence". Whilst not all dancing involves the overt expression of emotions, the physiology of orientating movements is also a physiology of expression (Berthoz, 1997)² making it possible to ponder a relationship existing between posture, emotion, artistic expression and personal character or identity. One has only to consider the theory and practice of Laban Movement Analysis to experience the truth in this. Thirdly, some of the constructs currently being researched within the field of dance psychology, such as motivation theory, elements of perfectionism and its relationship to control, might also be contributing factors when considering the foundations of a dancers' identity. Within the dance psychology field, new areas such as passion, (Walker, 2011) which may impact on identity, are currently being researched in relation to commitment and adherence. The only evidence currently available suggests that career commitment in dance is often fuelled by passion and that over time dancers may experience a gap between what is validated and supported in the culture at large and the values that fuelled their initial career choice (Levine, 2004). Shifts in the dancer's passion, independently and relative to their surrounding culture, could impact upon the dancer's perception of their career and consequently their identity.

As dancers evolve, they experience several transition processes; recreational to vocational, vocational to professional. With on going progression within the

² This is illustrated in Darwin's *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1899) and this indivisible relationship between posture and emotion falls within the realms of phenomenology, which is also embedded/embodied in the somatic methodology of Eric Franklin.

profession, the identity of the dancer may become more firmly embedded in the psyche. According to Erikson's identity theory (1968) it is the developmental task of adolescence to explore and answer questions pertaining to *who am I* and *where am I going?* Role experimentation is part of healthy construction of identity. It is important to acknowledge how the young dancer, already dedicated to and being nurtured in a rigorous professional training environment may frequently skip this process. Minimal role-play experience with adolescent peers independent from the world of dance potentially makes retirement from dance many years later even more difficult.

Independent from the points raised above, cultural/sociological viewpoints pervade identity theories. From a sociological viewpoint, ageing has been associated with 'symbolic capital' where wisdom respect and influence may elevate social status (Turner & Wainwright, 2003). I speculate that as a positive association, this is not so relevant to the professional dancer reaching the end of their performing career, because the shift in 'capital' which occurs in most other professions, including sport, cannot be so readily applied. In theory, Turner and Wainwright (2003) suggest, both sporting and dancing retired celebrities can retain their 'symbolic capital' by becoming stars in a related or adjacent field. However, in reference to a recent article in The Stage newspaper (Columbus, 2013) in reality, I believe that this, within the dance world is a rare occurrence. In fact, if it is accepted that a dancers' performing career is not often replaced by 'symbolic' gain, this notion of a potential chronological benefit is lost prematurely, thereby impacting negatively upon their identity.

The rest of this discussion will focus specifically on the professional dancer in career transition towards retiring from performance. Concepts of identity and it's loss, in relation to disengagement from the dance world and issues that may be related to the 'string' of human spirit, will be addressed.

Drawing on Sports Identity and Transition Theory/Studies

Career transition, within sports theory, has been defined as either normative, such as reaching the end of an agreed term of contract or personal/voluntary

retirement choice, or non-normative, of a more unpredictable nature, such as a sudden injury (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). The limited research that exists in dance identity focuses mainly on injury and the negative effect it has on dancers' identity (Wainwright et al, 2003; 2004b; 2005; Mainwaring et al, 2001). Therefore, in order to encompass an overview of concepts relating to identity with a wider relevance to transitional dancers, distinctions between normative and non-normative career transition will not be made, as this would narrow the discussion unnecessarily. Additionally, the latest dance research concludes that regardless of the reason, the end of a performing career after years of training brings serious challenges (Burns, 2010).

Identity in sports studies has been measured through use of the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS), based on the belief that it is reliable and valid (Brewer, 1993). From this, successful athletes appear to possess high athletic identity. High athletic identification and motivation have been found to be positively correlated and both of these variables are also consistent with adherence (Bubmann & Alfermann in Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). An internalised athletic identity likely dominates the individual's overall self-concept³. When retirement denies opportunities to foster and maintain this identity, the individual with such a strong, centralised athletic identity is presumed to lack the flexibility necessary for redefining the self-concept (Webb et al, 1998). Therefore, athletic identity *at the time* [author's italics] of retirement is an important factor (Brewer et al, 1993; 2000; Grove et al, 1997; Taylor & Ogilvie in Stambulova et al, 2006). Referring back to the topic of passion emerging from Walker's (2011) research and the acknowledged lack of 'symbolic capital' relative to the aging process, leads me to question as to whether increasing age and the presence of passion might be complex correlates. With this possibility in mind, Lee (1989) even suggests it is "probable" that some dancers might choose injury as a tactic to deal with transition. It could be argued that, if this holds any validity, it must bear some relation to their level of passion. Passion is defined as a powerful emotion that

³ Self- concept is thought to provide a description or picture of the self, whereas self - esteem refers to the evaluations and feelings one holds about this self - concept (Wells et al & Wylie, in Sonstroem et al, 1996).

can be expressed as love or anger. Lee's concept allows us to consider that a powerful exit from the profession through injury might be a reflection of the internalised passion retained by an older dancer.

Sports studies reveal that strong and exclusive athletic identity indicates greater difficulties with adaption and healthy career transition (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Brewer et al, 1993). Athletes possessing high athletic identity are more reluctant to end their career, experience greater negative emotions, require longer to adapt and are susceptible to depressive symptoms (Alfermann et al, 2004; Brewer et al, 2000; Erpic et al in Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007). Researchers have emphasised that a lengthy transition is related to the degree an athlete continues to identify with the role (Erpic et al, 2004; Stambulova et al, 2006). A rare but potentially highly comparable study on retirement from artistic gymnastics found that

...prematurely adopting an identity based solely on their role as a gymnast...participants...were as a result left feeling lost and helpless. For those who felt constant external pressure to strive for excellence during their career, and internalised perfectionist tendencies, this process was particularly challenging, and has lasted in some cases, for the duration of their retirement (Lavalley & Robinson, 2006 p.119).

It remains unknown whether these theories and findings transfer directly to dance, as there is limited research within the dance field.

Existing Literature Relating to Dance and Loss

The Wainwright/Turner studies (2003; 2004; 2005) provide a theoretical framework and insight into the effects of dance injury on identity. This has some crossover with career transition, but is limited in its usefulness, as their findings are restricted to professional classical ballet. Other dance literature relating to this topic also only focuses on classical ballet, these are descriptive narratives giving anecdotal accounts from a dancer and/or counsellor's perspective (Lee, 1988; Greben, 1989; 1999; 2002). They may also be considered to be outdated in relation to existing sports research. Nonetheless,

despite these limitations, it is the sole literature that is available within dance and until future research emerges it will be used as reference.

Beyond performance, the aDvANCE Project (Levine, 2004), built on a three year research study, is a dissemination of 3000 dancer survey questionnaires across three continents from a variety of dance genres, and is the largest, most recent evidence-based, dance specific document in this field. It concludes that professional dancers face unique transition challenges, which *diverge significantly* [author's italics] from professionals in other arts disciplines and other physically demanding fields (Levine, 2004). This viewpoint has informed the research question for this essay.

Loss

Various theoretical perspectives have been used to guide research on sport career termination: the most frequent experience, mentioned across the literature, is a sense of loss (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). A major loss is defined as "a significant reduction in personal, material and/or symbolic resources" (Harvey in Lavalley, 1997, p. 131). Theorists studying loss within the wider field of psychology agree that major loss has an effect on identity (Harvey, in Lavalley, 1997). Drawing comparisons, a rare dance study reveals that "...for individuals that have spent a lifetime working at something they love...Far from a new beginning, it may usher in a series of losses that encompass income, workplace, community, and most important, loss of identity" (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1991, p. 43). Lee writes, in relation to retiring from dance, internally and externally induced conflicts "produce a powerful experience of personal identity under assault" (1988, p. 28). For example, a decade after retirement a dancer states during a counselling session, "The performance I will miss for the rest of my life, because when I was performing that was really me one hundred percent" (Marguerite in Greben, 2002 p. 19). The psychological explanation is that perceptions and dispositions are ill adapted because they are attuned to an earlier state of the objective conditions (Bourdieu in Wainwright et al, 2006).

This suggests that there is something particular in the dance training and career, both on and off the stage, contributing to identity formation and making re-adjustment difficult. This collage of voices represents the loss that occurs and offers some suggested explanation. However, it fails to describe the nature of loss. The following proposal suggests a construct. It includes factors relating to injury and its impact on identity, previously identified. These ideas have begun to be addressed within the field of dance psychology and the culture of dance as a whole. The variables discussed at the start will be interwoven within the structure, which adheres to my use of Chlemars quotation.

The loss of a trilogy structure of identity?

I start in agreement with Turner and Wainwright (2003) acknowledging dance as not just something that you *do* - but something that you *are*, hence being a dancer is an embodiment of identity. Self-identity has been conceptualised from numerous perspectives (Lavalley & Robinson, 2006). Wainwright and Turner (2004b) summarise Harrés work on the natures of being: we are organic '*physical beings*' in fleshy bodies, we are individuals with a '*personal being*' and a '*social being*' and that these three ways of being have been considered to be philosophically superficial consequences of their '*spiritual being*'. Wainwright and Turner (2004b) go on to suggest that these modes of being are connected through embodiment. Therefore, based on the theories and previous studies in sport, and in relation to the philosophical argument of Cartesian error, there may be an integrated loss of three concepts of identity for the dancer experiencing career transition. For analytical purposes, I have chosen to highlight the impact of loss on a dancer's identity as they transition into permanent retirement by addressing it through a trilogy concept; namely the theory of body, mind and spirit.

The Body - Loss of Physical Identity

There can be few vocations in which professional capital (physical and cultural) is so dependent on the athletic body and its presentation (Wainwright

et al., 2005). For dancers physical being is the foundation of their vocation (Wainwright & Turner, 2004b). Yet, when dissecting complexities for analytical purposes we are left to consider three integrated physical manifestations of loss of identity, which I believe to be ability, physique, and embodied knowledge.

In consideration of ability, a dancer's career can be seen as two graph lines; an ascending curve of a dancer's artistry and a descending curve of his physical condition (Barnes in Lee, 1988.) Dance research highlights that the discipline required to literally exhaust your stocks of physical capital is the dancer's daily price for the acquisition of their lifetime's artistic capital (Wainwright et al, 2006); the body being sacrificed for the art. Supported by sports research, it is acknowledged that a physical and artistic relationship breakdown would be likely to have a psychological impact. Relating back to the aging process and the loss of physical freedom, physical modifications conceivably affect perceived physical competencies and physical self worth. There is a psychological framework suggesting that alterations to the physical self impacts on global self-esteem (Stephan et al, 2003). Towards the end of a dancer's career the nature of technical challenges may be more emphasised both physically and artistically. Former self-confidence may be replaced with self-doubt and, if the value of oneself is altered towards the negative, the overall self-concept and identity may also be affected.

Furthermore, for the professional dancer valuing a body/physique aesthetically glorified and putting in the effort required to maintain it, becomes the very essence of self-identity. It contributes to a *habitus*⁴ producing dispositions/tastes toward the body that emphasize beauty, youthfulness and athleticism, hence ageing, injury and retirement are more likely to be problematic (Wainwright & Turner, 2004a). This is exacerbated, if there is no replacement from the 'symbolic' respect and wisdom afforded by other professions. Both of these issues, due to their reliance on youth, are

⁴ 'Habitus' is the outcome of the sedimentation of past experiences, shaping the agents perceptions and actions of the present and future.

augmented by a real depreciation of diminishing 'physical capital'. I also suspect a perceived accelerated ageing process; as the dancer has been inherently trained to be acutely aware of subtle physical changes. Therefore loss of a dancer's physical identity is likely to have great relevance to sports science findings where successful transition into a new profession does not ensure an easy bodily transition in form of an acceptance of the physical changes that manifest from retirement (Chamalidis in Stephan et al, 2003).

Additionally, new acknowledgement is coming to the forefront of current debate; a way of understanding which is often forgotten in theories of intelligence, concerned with understanding one's body (Bourdieu, in Morris 2001) with movement being at the centre of perception. If it is recognised, as supported by educational theory (Gardner, 1993) that an early orientation towards physical literacy does exist, then this is already established as part of an individual's preferred modus operandi, and arguably their identity. If dancers have a heightened kinaesthetic knowledge then in contemplation of this, the retirement process still presents a loss. Whilst the internalised knowledge may remain cognitively, its connection to the physical inevitably becomes more distant.

The Mind - Loss of Ego Identity

Private and public identity can be viewed as conceptually distinct constructs with potentially different contributions to psychological adjustment to retiring from sports participation (Webb et al, 1998). Wainwright and Turner (2004b) make similar associations using different terminology in relation to professional dancing careers. They argue that dancers form communities of dancers and within these communities the individual's personal and social being help to forge a dancer's embodied identity. Both these constructs can fall within the Ego Identity theory, defined by Erikson (1968) as "the inner capital accrued...when successful identification led to alignment of the individual's basic drives with his endowment and his opportunities" (cited in Lee, 1989 p.64). Therefore, the occupational role of the dancer [private and

public, personal and social] becomes a core component of the ego identity and its loss can be devastating (Lee, 1988).

Again, based on Erikson's theory, "The ideologies that young adults are exposed to in college influence the identities that they will carry the rest of their lives" (Atkinson et al, 1995, p. 511). In this regard the potential influence of dance education is obvious. It is in the training that norms of what is valued are communicated to the young participant (Lee, 1989). The participant learns what is valued/emphasised in the manner of instruction. These values are ostensibly enhanced within the dance profession, with identity still forming in the twenties, correlating with the time of a dancer being likely near to the peak of career. Dance literature corroborates "It is because this world has produced me, because it has produced the categories of thought that I apply to it, that it appears to me as self-evident" (Bourdieu & Waquant, in Wainwright et al, 2006, p. 4). This is further exacerbated by the fact that findings from sport research reveal, the exceptional demands of high level sport can manifest in role restriction, preventing athletes engaging in a wide range of developmental tasks across their lifespan, including those that are needed to form a mature, well rounded identity (Grove, Lavalley & Gordon, 1997). Therefore, the mind becomes affected and limited to ways of thought that become engrained within the psyche.

The Spirit - Spiritual Sequelae

Introducing the third part of the trilogy requires entering the realm of phenomenology. Whilst Wainwright et al. (2005) explain the sheer physicality of their working lives is something that dancers become 'addicted to', it is possible that this 'compulsion' might also come from another source. In relation to dealing with injury, Wainwright et al have begun to consider a 'spiritual sequelae'. However, their focus is much more towards loss in relation to social interaction. Reflecting on Durkheim's expression for collective religious experiences, Turner and Wainwright (2003) suggest that 'collective effervescence' is a structure of emotions that is routinely reproduced through the collective experiences of dancing as a team. Inspired

by Sartre, Karpatschhof highlights fundamental ontological differences between phenomena with complex social interaction and those, which exist as part of individual behaviour in series, where people act in parallel ways, but independently of each other (Karpatschhof, in Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I am therefore proposing the possibility that there is also the loss of an individual spiritual connection from dance, separate to the social aspect, which may have a significant impact on identity for the dancer embarking on permanent retirement.

Dancers either enter into and/or continue to dance partly because of the feeling states it evokes for them (Schnitt & Schnitt, 1988). 'Feeling' may be defined as a 'state' of sensation, desire or emotion, which is not perception or thought (Fowlers Dictionary, 1989). It is also expressed in the following quotation to describe a *singular* experience of loss relating on an individual level to the 'spiritual sequelae' that Wainwright and Turner (2005) acknowledge happens from loss of the 'collective experience'. "The problem is feeling that one is no longer unique because something has been lost. That is the big problem, and that's a spiritual and emotional matter". (Horosko in Sidimus, 1987, p. 84) The use of 'spiritual', defined as having a relationship based on a profound level of mental or emotional communion, (Oxford Dictionary Online, 2011) can be linked back to the "string' of human spirit" described by Chlemer in my opening quotation. The nature of this connection for the dancer is "...achieved, paradoxically, by means of a single-minded concentration on the body" (Taper in Wainwright & Turner, 2003, p.5) and yet remains a profound partnership with *the art* of the dance during which the artiste may receive a euphoric feeling and/or a sense of release and giving in the performing. "There is nothing like dancing. It is the absolute high without drugs, making the rest of life's experiences dull in comparison" (Anonymous, in Lee, 1989, p. 69). The achievable 'spiritual high' can be compared to ritual dance practices⁵ and yoga, which focus on the body to ultimately achieve a higher state of consciousness. Therefore, when Mainwaring et al. (2001) propose that this barrier to self-expression as a result of injury may be a threat

⁵ For example, Sufi whirling

to a dancer's identity; it may have a far greater significance to retiring dancers in transition than their original focus/intention as the study suggests.

When the time comes: DCD & a Counsellors Perspective

The first task here is to dispel the assumption that dancers will demonstrate preparedness for career transition, because they have always known that early retirement is a fact. Published counsellor impressions (Greiben, 1989; 1999; 2002) note that from the outset a dancer accepts that his or her career will be comparatively brief (Greiben, 1992). Conversely, in other areas of the dance literature denial seems to be a key theme and the primary defence mechanism as exemplified by this quote "I thought I would dance forever. It was a shock when I had to stop" (Anonymous, in Levine, 2004, p. 8). This is supported by findings of the aDvANCE Project. Surveyed dancers overestimated their number of productive working years by a significant six to fifteen (Levine, 2004). Relating these findings to sports literature, the role restriction mentioned earlier in this discussion as being attributed to causing some deficiencies in identity formation has also been linked to reluctance to retire (Lavallee & Robinson, 2006). To have contemplated change in the abstract is different to finding oneself suddenly outside the world that has shaped one's values and provided social support from a young age (Levine, 2004). It has been highlighted that to discuss career end with aspiring professional dancers is problematic, as most dancers are very strong-willed and are resistant to addressing a future life after dance (Kupersmith in Sidimus, 1987). "Perhaps the commitment, coupled with the deprivation, exacerbates the difficulty of leaving, because it can force recognition of all that has been given up in pursuit of that identity" (Lee, 1989, p.70). The circumstances outlined above appear to connect directly to a recurring theme in the interview literature; that frequently dancers have no plan or goal for after their retirement.

The Dancer Career Development (DCD) part of the International Organisation for the Transition of Professional Dancers (IOTPD) offers a holistic and comprehensive range of specialist and confidential career support and

retraining services to professional dancers in the UK (DCD, 2011). In a 2007 survey 89% of all DCD retrained dancers were working in dance (Burns, 2010). This may indicate possible correlations between some of the psychological concepts introduced at the start of this paper; linking commitment, adherence and passion with dance identity and career transition. In my interview with Andrew Evans⁶, he revealed that the approach he uses is not focused on transferable skills because, “What it doesn't address is what dancers actually *get out of dance* and what is important to them *when they are dancing* and that might be something completely different.... with primary motivation you are in love with the process of doing it” (Evans, 2011). Here, motivation is another link back to initial ideas disseminated at the start through the deconstruction of the opening quotation to consider what might shape a dancer's identity. Evans uses a battery system of psychometric test models to assess motivation⁷. I had hypothesised that dancers' may deal with identity loss less well than other performers and athletes, I was therefore able to extrapolate from our interview Evans' remark that dance is a culture “conspicuously different” from other performing arts. Nevertheless, dancers usually do not seek psychological help. Evans describes those he does see as often controlled, unemotional and ‘business – like’ during the counselling process. As Turner and Wainwright (2003) highlight, professional discipline forms part of the dancing identity and Greben (2002) suggests the dancer has, from the use of the body, a sense of mastery or control. Whilst mastery of the body is different to control over the mind, it seems reasonable to surmise that the disciplined lifestyle of the dancer may both require and strengthen the ability to have the charge of the body and mind and hence be a fundamental part of the nature of a dancer's identity. Both Turner and Wainwright's and Greben's points seem to suggest dancers are likely to exhibit a higher than average level of internal locus of control both over their abilities and interaction with others (Dasch in Schnitt & Schnitt, 1988).

⁶ Performance artist psychologist, author and life coach for DCD referrals. Interview recorded and transcribed for use; see appendices.

⁷ Jung type test, 16 Personality Factor traits. See www.similarminds.com for examples. Also used, Team Roles, Occupational preferences, and a list of 32 Job Values (see appendices).

When I probed the topic of emotional control in relation to the loss of identity felt from facing retirement Evans considered the possibility that "...you may not see the inner grief of the loss" (Evans, 2011). This is supported by Whitely sharing my opinion that dancers are able to appear to have confidence and hide the lack of it (Burns, 2010). Lee (1989) distinguishes between a 'transition' [taken to mean an ease of passage] and a 'crisis' [being in a psychologically unstable predicament] as depending on an individual's internal resources and external support being adequately managed or 'overwhelmed'. In reflection of my personal research process, I put forward that there is likely to be much more complexity in control systems employed. This is echoed in athletes' experiences. As one former athlete, in Lavalee et al. (1997, p. 139) study, reports "Most people assumed that my life had become much easier to cope with, but there were times that someone who had been through it too would have helped". Acknowledging that expressing one's feelings is essential to healing, scientific data suggests that the act of confiding may benefit a distressful reaction to career termination (Lavellee et al, 1997). However, when considering Evans' experiences with emotional control in relation to dance career transitions other than from injury, identifying when and who to confide in seems to be an important factor. Therefore it seems highly possible that dancers may prefer to confide in other dancers who have been through the process.

A Golden Thread

In assimilating the information from my discussion, I continue to resonate with the opening quotation and add the following, "Dance is an art that imprints on the soul. It is with you every moment. It expresses itself in everything you do" (Shirley Maclaine, cited in Burns, 2010, p. 2). Whilst acknowledging increasing athletic requirements, all of the interviewees in the 2005 Wainwright study universally perceived the artistry involved to be the factor that makes their profession fundamentally different from other physically demanding sports. Undeniably, other artistically inclined sports such as figure skating and artistic gymnastics exist and similarities to identity formation and

retirement issues have been highlighted earlier. Yet, dance performance often occurs separate to the context of a competition, potentially contributing a shift towards the intrinsic value of the expression for its own validity. The emphasis on artistry can be viewed as the embodiment of one aspect of spiritual being (Wainwright & Turner, 2004b). It could be argued that whilst the athlete endeavours to achieve new heights of physical prowess, the dancers' aim is to transcend the physical into the realms of the spiritual. Transition out of dance therefore cannot be regarded as simply changing a job. Moving from dance into a new realm of existence involves becoming a new individual in body, mind and spirit⁸. In the terminology of Max Webber (cited in Wainwright & Turner, 2004), whereas a job is simply a means of making a living, a calling is an end in itself that requires no justification; experienced as a compulsion, not personal choice but an obligation. Hence, a dance career incorporates the two most significant psychological needs identified for human beings; love and work (Freud in Greben, 1989). Furthermore, developments in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci, E.L., & Ryan, R.M. 1995), recognizes also the "basic psychological needs" that must be satisfied in order for each individual to function effectively and experience wellness. These needs are autonomy, relatedness, and competence, all of which are compromised in the transition from professional dance.

Historically and cross-culturally, dance was first an 'intensely sacred experience' (Turner & Wainwright, 2003) and whilst it has been argued that this sense of dance has disappeared from secularised Western dance culture (Spencer, in Schnitt & Schnitt, 1988) I suggest that some of the unique difficulty within transition is this essence, which may remain within the individual psyche of dancer. Martha Graham used the phrase "Acrobats of God" (cited in Levine, 2004, p. 1) to invoke the rigour, passion, physical discipline and extraordinary spiritual commitment dancers bring to their chosen art. "I did not choose to be a dancer. I was chosen and with that you live your life". During our interview Evans quoted one of his clients who described his transition experience poetically as a the loss of a golden thread

⁸ The concept of re-invention is discussed in Wainwright et al (2005).

which exists from the moment you first have an intense passion for something to the point when you have to stop. Therefore, passion, which was highlighted at the start and mentioned through this discussion, seems likely to form an intrinsic part of the spiritual identity.

To the future

Dancers "...have some very special characteristics and needs, their healthcare should be something special too" (Kupersmith, in Sidimus, 1987, p. 100). Much is to be gained by organising facilities where artists can be assisted medically, psychologically and educationally (Greben, 1999). Currently reflected in the recent development of the first independent Dance Science and Health Clinic in the U.K, there is a strong interest in the pooling of knowledge from a variety of fields of expertise, working towards a greater understanding of dancers' physiological, psychological and artistic development. We have a responsibility to include in that, considerations of personal growth during and after the dancing career. The athletic demands made on the dancer's body are now so intense that it is reducing the length of what has always been a relatively short career (Wainwright & Turner, 2004b). The student should be made aware of the brief life span of a performing career and understand that other interests can enhance both dancing and life after performing; professional schools need to work toward an awareness of the problem (Erik Bruhn, in Sidimus, 1987)⁹. Over two decades after this point was made there is still a call for broader and more empowering dance education, with the underlying understanding that it fosters artistry and helps cultivate that creative spark that sets apart the ordinary from the extraordinary dancer. In short, effective preparation for career transition is closely aligned with emerging thinking about what constitutes effective preparation for a performing career (Levine, 2004).

In terms of empirical dance transition research, all the work is ahead. Career Termination Models from sports (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007) are yet to

⁹ (1928 - 1986) Artistic Director, National Ballet of Canada and Royal Swedish Ballet.

be addressed through developing a dance specific model, or to use/develop a specific Identity Measurement Scale (Brewer, 1993) for considering precursors to transitional sequelae, particularly from approaches within dance training. Through my discussion with Evans it was agreed that a research model examining the nature of emotional intelligence of dancers before, during and after transition is worthy of some consideration. This has the potential of exploring the applied use of account making¹⁰ (Lavallee et al, 1997) and/or somatic techniques¹¹, both potentially appropriate tools to address the nature of the losses described in this discussion and assist in the process of adapting to retirement from dance.

Ultimately, issues of dancer career transition cannot be separated from embedded cultural attitudes about the role of the artist in society. This, in turn, means that collaborative mobilization on this issue is warranted by all who invest in the artistic and economic health of the dance field and its practitioners (Levine, 2004). Themes about the ageing process are beginning to be examined within the field of ethnographic research, reflecting similar issues within the spiritual culture of the art of dance¹². As noted by Phoenix et al. (2007), young athletes may become socialised by an embodied narrative apprenticeship of negative ageing and have little to draw upon that might enable them to perceive ageing in more positive and optimistic ways. The disorientating effects of neoliberalism or what Elliot refers to as 'new capitalism' means there is little stable ground in the workplace (Elliot in Wainwright & Turner, 2004b). This in turn means that any re-invention required from the retiring dancer is set against a political/economic backdrop of an unstable market place¹³. "I found it difficult at first to let go of my identity...In hindsight I would have dealt with the issue of multiple identities

¹⁰ Account making; a narrative containing emotional expression, traits, and description of self has been hypothesised to be a beneficial way of coping with loss of identity (Harvey, Orbuch and Weber, 1992 cited in Lavallee et al, 1997).

¹¹ Somatic techniques may be appropriate intervention in transitional circumstances as by definition they address the mind/body/spirit as a holistic entity.

¹² Ruth Pethybridge (Falmouth, 2011) argues the case for cross -generational dance by encouraging "recognition of embodied uniqueness through the rupture of difference".

¹³ This is echoed by an upsurge in mainstream interest in career trajectory guidance e.g. What colour is your parachute? Bolles, R.N. (2001).

earlier" (David McCormick, former dancer, courtesy of the DCD). In an environment with generally significantly reduced job security, dancers now have commonalty with other professionals embarking on a portfolio career. Consequently, more attention should be paid to providing dancers with every opportunity to navigate the challenges of career transition successfully. Career support should start early and be integrated into every aspect of a dancer's life journey (Levine, 2004.). Pethybridges (2011) notion of 'insubstitutability' involves 'valuing dancers for *who* rather than *what* they are' in contrast to the dancer's professional reality, where they are easily 'replaceable/dispensable'. Dance education should continue moving towards embracing the *who* in body, mind and spirit. Whilst Wainwright et al, (2005) acknowledge the 'collective effervescence' of dancing within a company, I postulate referring back to opening this discussion with Chlemars quotation that a personal connection with 'spirit' holds up part of a singular identity and that an individual's "string' of human spirit" is a precious fine thread. If as dance educators we can recognise that it is this 'string' that pulls all the 'components' into order and that it will eventually disconnect from the dance, we should also remember its description as "a golden thread", ...in the reflexive project of the self, the narrative of self-identity is inherently fragile" (Giddens, in Wainwright et al, 2005, p.15).

The union of soul and body is not an amalgamation between two mutually external terms...It is enacted at every instant in the movement of existence [...] a necessity the psychologist knew to be in the depths of his being as he became aware of it as a piece of knowledge (Merleau - Ponty, (1962), p.102).

A dancer is created when the body and mind are pulled into order by the spirit, so there is this same trilogy of loss to consider when the 'string' disconnects from the dance as it impacts on identity and the transition into life after dance. Scientifically, at present, there are no available measurement means other than the qualitative gathering of a shared collective knowledge.

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Appendices

Transcribed interview with Andrew Evans (Themes and quotations highlighted).

Evans, A. (2011) Informed consent.

Evans, A. (2011). 32 Job Values.

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