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## Dance Students at a Two Year College: Making Sense of their Academic, Cultural, and Social World

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DANCE STUDENTS AT A TWO YEAR COLLEGE:  
MAKING SENSE OF THEIR ACADEMIC, CULTURAL, AND SOCIAL WORLD

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
in the Department of Children, Family, and Community Sciences  
in the College of Education and Human Performance  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate the lived experiences of community college dance students. Previous research was examined to provide a more holistic picture of dancers during their college years and while in the workforce. The literature reviewed indicated that the emergence of dance as a field of study was controversial. Its beginnings were marked by debates concerning (a) the very definition of dance as a body of motion and a body of knowledge that includes a history and a philosophy as asserted by Dimondstein (1985), (b) its legitimate place within the academy (the perception that university dance programs were vocational in nature with little academic value) as noted by Stinson (1990); and, more recently (c) the possibility of some resolution to make dance not only a performing art but an academic discipline in its own right (Savrami, 2012). The theoretical framework of social cognitive career theory was used but was modified to include only the tenets most frequently cited in the literature that directly influenced the career identity of dancers particularly in relation to their motivation to academically persist and graduate. The phenomenological analysis, in the tradition of Moustakas (1994) and Wertz (2005), produced an early thematic matrix of 18 codes that were reduced to six major themes: aspirations, academic commitment, emotional identification, anticipated outcome or career expectation, vicarious learning, and challenges. One of the major recommendations included conducting a longitudinal study focusing on how students navigate an unpredictable job market, including the discussion of issues of workforce preparation in the academic curriculum and major.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## VIGNETTE

Kelly, a 20-year-old female dance student in a large metropolitan city, is starting her last semester of college before graduating with her Associate in Arts degree in dance. She is feeling conflicted about what her future plans should be after graduation. Kelly would like to continue pursuing a bachelor's degree in dance; also, she would like to try a different career path with safer job prospects. In addition, she is feeling pressure from her parents to find a new career path and to make dance a hobby. She started dancing as a teenager, and she wants to expand her skills by becoming a dance major. Now, Kelly is older and facing the decision concerning her college major. Her parents and friends often ask her what her intentions are after graduation. With many things to consider, Kelly wonders if she is even good enough to make a career in dance. She considers her long-term employability and possible compensation; she also realizes that pursuing a bachelor's degree may mean that she will have to relocate to find a job after graduation. Kelly has lived in the same city all of her life and is uneasy about the thought of moving. One thing Kelly does know is that she loves performing and is motivated by her dance achievements and the potential for personal growth. She realizes she has many issues to consider as she ponders her education and her career identity.

## CHAPTER 1 THE PROBLEM AND ITS CLARIFYING COMPONENTS

### Introduction

Dance is not merely movement, but rather skillful movement of artistic value (Savrami, 2012). Early pioneers of dance developed rhythmic and natural body movements (Kassing, 2010), leading to aesthetic dance that came together at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the United States, dance emerged in the early 1900s, as visiting Russian ballet companies and their ballerinas, who seemed to float on air, charmed American audiences. Russian ballerinas such as Anna Pavlova, who made her first U.S. appearance in 1910, captivated audiences (Kassing, 2010). In 1905, the American Physical Education Association chose dance as the theme for its national convention, thus placing a spotlight on the growing importance of dance in the US. Soon after, in 1926, the University of Wisconsin launched the first university dance major (Carter, 1984). Since its origin, dance has qualified as a form of physical education and later grew to an art-based form of education (Risner, 2010).

The evolution of dance education includes a profound transformation, from a physical exercise to an artistic performance driven by choreography. Put simply, dance has emerged as a form of artistic communication. Through movement of body, dance reflects and interprets history, experiences, and culture (Smith, 2008). In addition, movement qualified as a way of learning, providing dancers with an opportunity to learn through the use of the body in motion (Zitomer & Reid, 2011). Of course, the relevance of dance and its place in higher education has had its detractors; the importance of movement and dance education has been debated for years (Hauschild-Mork, 2012). One driver of the debate regarding dance education involves the lack

of clarity concerning what constitutes dance education. Like any other academic discipline, the study of dance needs to be described and defined to clarify what it is and what it is not (Dimondstein, 1985).

That said, collegiate dance programs have established a permanent place in higher education, typically under the umbrella of other programs that creates challenges related to gaining independent resources (Pulinkala, 2013). Historically, the subject of dance has struggled to find stability in the academy (Hauschild-Mork, 2012). So what does dance education mean to dance students? And what does a career in dance look like? The realities of the profession and career perceptions of students can differ drastically.

The scholarly literature, as well this researcher's own experience, demonstrates that dancing requires long hours of work, discipline, and commitment. This study was conducted to examine the responses of current degree seeking dance students to bring meaning to their academic and social experiences. In addition, the students from this study came from the community college setting. This qualitative study was conducted to explore the pressures, barriers, and joys dance students face while trying to complete their bachelor's degrees. In this study, I also sought to uncover the motivational drive of dance students. Furthermore, I intended to capture the academic challenges experienced by dance students and how these challenges relate to retention and graduation. I also sought to explore the difficulties perceived by students who major in dance. Finally, I generated insights into dance education from the students' points of view. The data collected in this study may reveal how to better serve the dance student population.

### General Background

For many college students enrolled in fine art programs such as drama, theatre, and dance, there are many external pressures to quit or change majors; one source of external pressure concerns the perception that a university dance program is a vocational program with little academic value (Stinson, 1990). The scarcity of financial resources for university dance programs may be connected to the dominant perspective of the program having little academic value. Dance students may face other difficulties, such as lack of parental and financial support that can arise because of the perceptions of dance majors. Cultural and societal pressures can also create obstacles for students because dance can be seen as taboo.

Despite the negative perception of dance programs, the role of dance in education has experienced many positive changes and benefited from growth over the years. For example, there is a movement to make dance not only a performing art but an academic discipline in its own right (Savrami, 2012); dance is not just a body of motion but also a body of knowledge that includes a history and a philosophy (Dimondstein, 1985). This growth of dance programs has led to notion of dance as a profession. As noted in a state-of-the-field report in 1996, we have something that can be called a profession (Alter, 1997).

### Statement of the Problem

There are over 600 postsecondary institutions offering dance programs in the United States (National Dance Education Organization [NDEO], 2016). These postsecondary institutions consist of two- and four-year colleges and universities. In 2007, there were 4,314 total colleges and universities in the United States. To give a comparison in 2007 there were

approximately 32,000 private dance studios and schools in the United States (NDEO, 2016). To be fair, some of these 32,000 dance studios may not be equivalent to the high quality dance programs that one would receive in college. However, these numbers would still show that dance programs in higher education have strong competition in recruiting students for their programs.

Another item to consider is the fact that anyone without a degree in dance can work as a dance instructor. This means parents or students may not see the value or advantages of a dance degree versus training at a proprietary school. This can impact their decision making when deciding on a major because there are other similar alternatives to choose from. The academic value of dance in college can be questioned if its curriculum is perceived to be similar to a proprietary school. Quality dance instruction is difficult to define. The quality of instruction can be inaccurately determined based on the satisfaction of the students and parents, or based on awards or recognitions the school has received. Subsequently, the perception of a dance program receiving no complaints is that it must be an exceptional dance program (Harris, 2013). Thus, if dancers can learn from a proprietary school why do they even bother enrolling in a dance program at a college? Considering the fact that any particular dance style can be taught outside of the college or university setting more information is needed to explain why students seek to learn dance at the college level. Defining the different factors that make dance in higher education appealing to students may help shed light as to what motivates the dance students to earn a degree in dance.

Also the number of dancers far outweighs the number of performance positions available, so the field is very competitive (Bennett & Bridgstock 2015). Knowing the job market and how

difficult it may be to support oneself, dance students may question their commitment to a dance career. If the student decides to switch majors, it can lead to taking additional courses and prolong graduation. Dance students and parents alike may wonder if their curriculum and instruction can lead to successful employment after graduation. If not, the dance student will be at risk of dropping out of the dance program or possible even dropping out of college completely. In addition, parents may push their children into more traditional majors such as engineering, computers, or nursing because they are also aware of the competitive job market for dancers. More research should be done on this student population to identify what motivates them to persist and if their curriculum has met their expectations.

The risks of injury and the challenge of finding continual work are all areas that prospective students are likely to consider when selecting dance as a major. The life of a professional dancer is full of risks. Dancers risk physical injury and endure stress for very low wages (Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). In addition, some dancers may have poor health insurance or no insurance at all (Chua, 2014). A previous case study with dance participants that was conducted verified the challenges a professional dancer confronts. In the study, dance participants were asked to identify prominent challenges; and some of the most common responses were lack of continuity in their work, low pay, and finding enough work to support themselves (Risner & Anderson, 2012).

The people most likely to build sustainable careers appear to be those with strong networks (social capital) and an entrepreneurial outlook (Bennett, 2009). Dance curricula in colleges prepare students to secure positions as professional dancers but lack courses on teaching and entrepreneurship. In 2014, there were 20,100 professional dancers and choreographers



employed in the United States (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2016). With employment of dancers expected to grow 5% from 2014 to 2024 (BLS, 2016), the current study was conducted to examine why students still continue to pursue dance in higher education.

Authors have highlighted the importance of the student experience for persistence (Sancho-Vinuesa, Escudero-Viladoms, & Masia, 2013). Gaining insight into the student experience and determining how students feel can explain why they believe they benefit from being a dance major. The current study revealed that dance students encounter many barriers in their journeys to become dancers. At the time of the present study, documentation on the lived experiences of dance students in higher education was limited. This valuable information can help the colleges' better serve these students, as schools can focus on meeting these needs.

#### Significance of the Study

Over the past 40 years, there has been tremendous growth in the number of dance programs nationwide (Van Dyke, 2012). The number of college dance programs grew from 59 in the mid-1950s to over 340 programs in 1997 (Alter, 1997). Recent data showed that there were over 600 higher education institutions in the United States offering dance programs (Conger, 2015). In addition to dance degrees, many colleges also offer performing arts theater programs which involve dancing. In 2009, 56 million people held bachelor's degrees; of that 56 million, 13 million had received degrees in arts and humanities (Siebens & Ryan, 2012). Table 1 illustrates the growth of college dance programs over the years.

Table 1

*Growth in Dance Programs*

Year	Number of Dance Programs
1950	59
1997	340
2015	600+

Note: Adapted from “Field of Bachelor’s Degree in the United States: 2009,” by J. Siebens and C. L. Ryan, 2012. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/acs-18.pdf>

Research into students’ perceptions of dance studies has been limited (Tsompanaki & Benn, 2011). There is very little extensive data to illustrate the experiences of being a dance student at a college. The executive director of the National Dance Education Organization has stated that insufficient data collection and research is a threat to dance education (Hauschild-Mork, 2012). More studies are required to look critically at dance education. This study offered participants in the research a chance to be heard. Students were able to discuss their career expectations and the expectations they had of the dance program. The future of dance as a discipline can be enhanced through listening to students’ needs (Tsompanaki & Benn, 2011). This research provided dance students the opportunity to voice their experiences. By analyzing the interviews, field notes, and data, conclusions were able to be drawn to see if the students were satisfied with their educational experience. Schools and administrators are acutely aware of the importance of the relationship between student satisfaction and retention. This study also explored how student relationships with family members and peers, impact their decisions to remain enrolled as dance students. It was also hoped that the qualitative data might also demonstrate how dance students manage negative stereotypes or generalizations. The

information collected was intended to aid instructors in figuring out what role can they play in the success of their students and how can they provide a bridge between the academy and practice. More specifically, the study of factors contributing to the retention of performing arts students was intended to better assist colleges and universities retain these students. Lastly, the feedback received can benefit colleges by finding ways to enhance student experiences and work toward student success after graduation.

### Conceptual Framework

The framework for this study was social cognitive career theory. The building blocks of this theory revolve around self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals (Lent & Brown, 2006). Social cognitive career theory is based on Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory. People who have a resilient sense of self efficacy approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered and not avoided (Bandura, 1989). Higher levels of self-efficacy are estimated to lead to approach verses avoidance (Betz & Hackett, 2006). In this model, anxiety is a consequence of weak self-efficacy. There is no term called career self-efficacy; thus, self-efficacy is part of an umbrella of beliefs of career related behavior that can be estimated. Social cognitive career theory suggests that career choice is influenced by the individual's personal performance accomplishments (mastery experiences), vicarious learning (modeling), social persuasion and physiological state (Lent & Brown, 2006). Vicarious learning is a fundamental source of self-efficacy (Chan & Lam, 2008). Vicarious learning means modeling a teacher or even peers. Modeling gives the student the opportunity to compare and assess their own capability of the task (Chan & Lam, 2008). Modeling can produce assimilation, and seeing

others succeed can act as a source of inspiration. Social cognitive career theory looks to interpret the factors that shape vocational interests, educational interests and choices (Sheu et al., 2010). Social cognitive career theory was originally composed of three models that explain the processes through which people expand basic academic and career interests (Sheu, et al., 2010). Recently, a fourth model was introduced which focuses on work and educational satisfaction (Lent & Brown, 2006). According to SCCT, people develop goals to pursue career and academic activities based how consistent they are with their own interests, self-efficacy, and outcome expectations (Sheu et al., 2010). Overall, an individual's personal accomplishments can have the most impact on their self-efficacy. In a constructivist approach such as SCCT, self-identity influences one's perceived ability to take on a new task (Bennett, 2009). Successful experiences tend to raise one's self efficacy, but experiences related to failures tend to lower self-efficacy (Lent & Brown, 2006). Having a sense of accomplishment and optimism can help individuals overcome adversity to reach their goals. When it comes to dancing and self-efficacy, individual students have to ask themselves, "Can I do this?"

For outcome expectations, individual will ask themselves what will happen if they decide to become dance majors. By choosing a major, students will examine the perceived consequences of that course of action. Anticipated outcomes can range from benefits to one's family, financial gains, personal gains, and self-approval from others (Lent & Brown, 2006). The satisfaction model of SCCT is an extension of SCCT that links college students' affective commitment to their majors. It is the emotional identification that students perceive towards their area of study (Conklin, Dahling, & Garcia, 2012). The focus is on the student expectations

of career performance and satisfaction. Figure 1 illustrates the building blocks, tenets, and influences of career identity for dance students in relation to SCCT.



*Figure 1.* Tenets of social cognitive career theory for dancers.

Social cognitive career theory proposes a triadic relationship between individual differences, environmental factors, and behaviors that together explain occupational interests and goals (Conklin et al., 2012). Figure 2 illustrates the most common building blocks, tenets, and influences of career identity for dance students in relation to SCCT. The tenets selected were determined by me, based on how frequently I found them in the literature. These are the common principles that I found mentioned regularly in previous research.



Figure 2. Selected tenets of social cognitive career theory for dancers.

### Positionality

My lens, by which I describe my position, comes from my experience as a professional dancer and my nine years of dance training. I started dancing my senior year in college, so I never considered it as a possible major. Nor do I believe I would have possibly ever selected dance as my degree of choice due to the uncertain job prospects. I was fortunate enough to have financial aid and a prepaid program to help cover my tuition and expenses as an undergraduate. So my gut feeling would lead me to believe that my parents would have been very disappointed with me if I selected dance as a major. For one, my parents always considered dance to be a hobby not a career. My mother would encourage me often as a youth to take up a career in computers or engineering. I mention my parents' attitudes toward dance to tell my story. I do not consider my parents' feelings to be a generalization of how all parents feel. Again, I most

likely would not have been a dance major in college just because I would have seriously doubted the return on the investment. I also would have had a sense of guilt using my parents' hard earned money on a major of which they would not approve. My dance specialization is in the Latin dances. Also, it is important to point out I never took any dance classes in higher education. Having not graduated from a dance program, I have no firsthand knowledge if dance programs are producing a workforce that is meeting a need in society. All of my training has come from the private sector. After graduating from college, my parents would frequently ask if I would cut back on my dancing so I could invest my time and money more wisely. I translated their advice to mean that "it is time for you to start working in your career and move on from this dance phase." My dance experience has not only taken me across the United States; it has also allowed me to travel internationally. To be clear, I have never worked as a full time dancer. All of the dance jobs I have held were temporary. In addition, my dance jobs are not my primary source of income. This allows me to take on jobs in dance at my own discretion because I am not relying on this income to sustain my quality of life. This is similar to most professional dancers because most dancers will have secondary jobs. However, because I studied psychology and educational leadership in college, I have always identified working in higher education as my career of choice. My sense of urgency to become a successful dancer is not as high as those who studied dance in college and identify themselves as dancers for their occupation.

My experience in higher education has led me to the realization that research on dance students is scarce. Other majors in the hard sciences receive more attention in higher education. There are volumes of literature on students studying mathematics, science, and engineering. In addition there are many government and school initiatives promoting STEM degrees, though the

opposite can be said for dance majors in terms of promotion. This can be due to the fallout from the financial crash of 2007. The job market is tough, and many families had their savings affected by the financial crash (Conger, 2015). In response to the financial crash many students looked for degrees that would put them in a better position for financial independence. In 2013, the members of Congress created a five-year strategic plan for STEM education (National Science and Technology Council, 2013). The initiative was created to make STEM more of a priority in the administration's educational efforts. In addition, President Obama wanted to prepare 100,000 STEM teachers over the next 10 years to be ready to teach (National Science and Technology Council, 2013).

As a student studying educational leadership, I felt the need to research and bring attention to a student population that can sometimes be overshadowed by the popular hard sciences. In regard to most of the research on dance students and their motivations, the popular studies are slightly outdated. My motivation in conducting this study was to explore new trends and findings and place a spotlight on the dance student population.

### Research Questions

Following are the two research questions which guided the study. Table 2 shows the relationship between the research questions and the theoretical framework.

1. What leads college students to a pre-major in dance?
2. How do dance majors in college make sense of their college journey?



Table 2

*Relationship between Research Questions and Theoretical Framework*

Research Questions	Theoretical Framework					
	Interests	Personal Accomplishments	Anticipated Outcomes	Self-Efficacy	Personal Goals	Educational Satisfaction
1. How do students come to be dance majors in college?	X	X	X	X		
2. How do dance majors in college make sense of their college journey?		X		X	X	X

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were used throughout this study.

Anxiety: Underachieving due to stress and uncertainty when tasks are experience as challenging or must be performed under stressful conditions (Kappe & Flier, 2012).

Outcome expectations: Positive or negative career-related experiences that can be anticipated to occur in the future (Conklin et al., 2012).

Perform: To entertain an audience; to do an action that requires training or skill (“Perform,” 2016)

Proprietary school: A business or profit seeking enterprise (“Proprietary,” 2016). Private sector school for example Arthur Murray dance studios.

Retention: The act of being retained. In terms of higher education retention is when students stay enrolled in school or more specifically their major.

Stigma: Occurs when a personal possesses an attribute that is associated with a negative stereotype (Kraus, 2010).

Self-efficacy: Beliefs about an individual's ability to succeed. Self-efficacy is a judgment an individual has on their own capability to organize and execute a course of action (Lent & Brown, 2006).

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The literature review addresses issues related to: challenges, motivation, social factors, and cultural factors. Constructing an identity as a dancer and selecting dance as a major in college will also be covered. In addition, this literature review contains a discussion of the role of higher education and the struggle to show dance education as having academic value. The topic of academic value is followed by theories of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and the social cognitive perspective.

### Challenges

Dance students may not continue to dance if they also feel their goals are beyond their own abilities (Stinson, 1990). Students choose dance over other majors because it seems to be a good fit between their skills and their passion (Risner & Stinson, 2010). For students with dreams of being a professional dancer there comes a time when they must evaluate their skills and see if being a professional is achievable. Dance ability is made up of body and spatial awareness, ability to follow music cues, ability to imitate movement, and visualization and recall skills (Zitomer & Reid, 2011). Dancers need to be able to recall lengthy sequences of body movements. Professional dancers have exceptional muscle memory. Other cognitive processes that dancers need to have include the ability to synchronize their movements concerning music, timing, and coordination with other dancers (Chua, 2013). Dance students need to have good joint mobility, and muscular strength. Professional dancers exhibit a great range of motion and

flexibility called hypermobility (Chua, 2013). An example would be for a dancer to dance on pointe they would need to have a minimum ninety degree plantarflexion of the foot (Chua, 2013). Knowing what is necessary to become successful dance students must assess their skills and align them with future job prospects. Dance students may decide to quit if they feel their skills are not proficient enough to continue.

Additionally, some dance students encounter internal conflict with whether they would like to continue dance programs knowing that the resulting pay may not be that great. The students may also have questions if they can build sustainable careers after graduation. Dance students may love to dance but may quit knowing that there is little monetary reward (Stinson et al., 1990). One's self-efficacy can be high for job performance but the outcome expectations can be lowered if there is not enough monetary gain to reward the performance (Lent & Brown, 2006). Finally, dance students who are very competitive can use that emotion to strive for more and stay in the program. Drive or the degree of motivation an individual has defines their effort (Kappe & Flier, 2012). Dancers continue dancing because they want to thrive in their career. To quit dancing would mean that all the years of training and study were wasted (Alter, 1997). To give up creates a feeling of failure.

Often times there is a real pressure for dance students to validate their major to others and show why they chose dance as a major. Artists such as painters and sculptors create art that is tangible. Dancing leaves nothing behind. The images created by the body are perceived through our visual-kinesthetic senses (Dimondstein, 1985). At the moment of its creation it is gone and the spectator is only left with an afterimage (Van Zile, 1985). It can be argued that dance produces an ephemeral event. This can be a reason why some people are not clear as to what it

is a dancer does. Or the fact that dance does not produce material objects of value can be a reason that many do not realize the worth of a dance program. The value and worth of dance programs to many cultures can be perceived as insignificant or just entertainment (Bannon, 2010). Choosing a major in college is a decision making process. The decision can be trivial if there is no guarantee of a legitimate outcome. Students who take dance in higher education must show how studying dance and dance history has benefitted them. For dance to be a considerable career consideration, students and parents must come to an understanding of what dance can offer them (Lo, 2006). Dancers overwhelmingly want people to know what it is they actually do, how hard they work and why it is important to them (Conger, 2015). Dance students are constantly seeking proof that dance education does fulfill the claims they make in advocacy (Stinson, 2005).

In the United States, as well as other countries dance agencies, dance artists, and dance researchers are discussing major issues concerning the development of the quality of dance study courses (Tsompanaki & Benn, 2011). In Canada for example, the topic of creative dance belonging in the education curriculum has been debated for the past two decades. Most of the provinces consider creative dance as part of their physical education curriculum. However, some provinces are considering placing dance under arts education (Bergmann, 1995). Again, it is important that this distinction is made. Similar to other forms of art, dance has aesthetic qualities such as line, design, balance, symmetry, and shape (Bergmann, 1995). Each art form has separate characteristics that provide a unique image. Paintings, sculptures, and dance all share similar aesthetic qualities. To classify dance as just movement or a sport totally disregards that the movement involved in dance is expressive and meaningful. The confusion or ambiguous

ideas about dance not being a sport maybe be attributed to the fact that gymnastics and figure skating are considered aesthetic sports (Bergmann, 1995). There is a need to clarify exactly what it is a dance student actually studies. That way there can be an unambiguous justification for including dance as a legitimate art form (Bergmann, 1995).

A degree holder in dance may be questioned as to what a degree in dance means. A holder of a PhD degree was asked the same thing and answered that a PhD in dance has its own conventions and value, just like any other academic subject (Savrami, 2012). Students with aspirations of receiving a degree in dance will constantly answer questions to explain the subject of their work. According to Savrami (2012), “Usually I avoid defensive justification by comparing Dance Studies to one of its neighboring disciplines” (p.100). Stating that dance studies are like theatre history just about dance instead of theatre (Savrami, 2012). One of the more significant arguments in dance education was related to dance as expressive art and discipline needing to occupy a field of education. The inclusion of dance in the academic curriculum has brought pressures to develop related interests and scholarly aspects to its methodology (Van Dyke, 2012).

The objective of this study was to determine the primary challenges that influence dance students and discourage them from graduating with a degree in dance. Identifying the motivations of dance students was intended to help in determining what engages them. When dealing with obstacles, dance students can either quit or push through and overcome adversity. Some dance students face obstacles such as self-doubt, fear, dislike of hard work, and lack of confidence (Bond & Stinson, 2007). Dancing is an art that showcases talents and flaws. By dancing, individuals put a spotlight on their abilities and leave themselves vulnerable to

criticism. Dance students can lose their enjoyment and desire for mastery because of excessive criticism (Stinson, 2005). Also, fear is a powerful inhibitor for engagement in dance (Bond & Stinson, 2007). Self-doubt can lead to a lack of confidence for dancers. As a student in higher education, dance students may wonder if they are good enough and if they possess enough skill to be successful as dancers. Understanding the level of commitment needed to be successful as a dancer, students may also question their own efforts and practice habits. The pressure to succeed can cause anxiety and have a negative impact on student.

### Educational Barriers

In general, access to higher education has increased; however, student success as measured by persistence and degree attainment has not improved (Brock, 2010). Factors such as remedial education, financial aid, and lack of student support services can all contribute to dance students as well as other students not completing their degrees. Even with college graduates having better prospects in the labor market than non-graduates, students still continue to drop out when faced with barriers. Historically, discriminatory laws and attitudes served as barriers to minority students and women trying to pursue a college degree (Brock, 2010). Another trend in persistence and completion is that undergraduates who begin at a four-year institution are about twice as likely to complete their degree compared with students who begin at a two-year institution (Brock, 2010). The risk factors in persistence for non-dance majors are the same risk factors negatively correlated with persistence for dance majors. This means that delayed entry from high school, working full-time, single parenthood, taking remedial courses, and inadequate college preparation are all risk factors that can stop completion of earning a college degree

(Brock, 2010). Lack of information can have students not knowing what resources are available at the college that can help them succeed and fill their major requirements. This can affect how families perceive barriers and college aspirations for their children.

Different cultures also perceive barriers differently and have different beliefs about going to college. Person-based barriers and private ethnic regard were not positively associated with educational aspirations (Gonzalez, Stein, & Huq, 2012). Latino students may also receive biased or discouraging information regarding going to college. Hispanic students may have difficulties or feel uncomfortable with taking classes in English if English is their second language. Also students of different cultures may have a lack of culturally similar college educated role models to encourage or inspire them to attend or complete college (Gonzalez et al., 2012). Students who have parents from other countries or are immigrants may depend on having guides or mentors who are familiar with the United States higher education system to help explain to them the processes of college. In SCCT, perceived barriers and self-efficacy beliefs for educational and career tasks are linked (Gonzalez et al., 2012). If individuals have a high sense of self-efficacy, they will be able to cope with perceived barriers and move beyond the challenges. Ethnic centrality and ethnic regard have been examined in youth from immigrant families to see how they are associated with academic attitudes. In general, when youth feel a greater ethnic centrality or importance, they reported feeling more motivated, a greater connection with their school, and a positive sense of self-esteem (Gonzalez et al., 2012). Understanding the predictors of educational hopes can be a benefit to the nation's youth and immigrant youth. Identifying barriers and creating solutions are the keys to not only promoting college access but also student



success. Tutoring, financial aid, and academic advising are all tools that can assist students with their pursuit of degree completion.

College educators, professionals, and tutors all continue to seek and develop ways to assist students in meeting their academic goals (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). These strategies can be used to help overcome academic obstacles faced by different types of student populations. Addressing challenges is critical to helping students reach their full potential. Not only do immigrant students face academic obstacles, first generation students also encounter unique challenges. First generation students typically have lower levels of academic preparation and frequently need to be employed full-time to help pay for education and cost of living expenses (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). Family and work demands are more likely to keep first generation students less engaged with the college. Researchers have shown that first generation students are less likely to study in groups, engage with faculty and students, and use support services (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). First generation students can feel a lack of belonging or a feeling of isolation (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). This student population is less likely to be engaged with peers and tend to live off campus. A distinct disadvantage shown between first generation and non-first generation students is that first generation students are less academically prepared for college (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). The lack of academic preparation can be due to lack of college preparatory courses and AP credits taken in high school (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). Due to the lack of college preparation in high school, first generation students are more likely to take remedial courses (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). Low income, first generation students were nearly four times more likely to leave college after the first year compared to non-first-generation students (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). Additionally, the barriers and lack of academic preparation

have widened the educational attainment gap between underserved students and other students (Dyce, Albold, & Long, 2013). Not only does parental involvement affect first generation students; it is also key to educational aspirations and motivations.

### Motivation

Motivation is what gives purpose to a behavior. When people are inspired or invigorated, they feel the drive to move, initiate, to continue, or to complete tasks (Criss, 2011). Motivation is commonly intertwined with engagement literature. Engagement is supported by the force of motivation (Frichtel, 2012). The study of motivation explains why behavior is initiated, persists, and stops (Sullivan & Strode, 2010). Motivated dancers will be moved to sustain efforts and participate in training activities (Chua, 2013).

Intrinsic and extrinsic rewards can be motivators with intrinsic rewards ultimately being the longer lasting more powerful motivator (Criss, 2011). Intrinsic motivation can promote student learning and achievement better than extrinsic motivation (Lei, 2010). Evidence supports that intrinsic motivation is positively correlated with learning, achievement, and perception of competence and at the same time is negatively correlated with anxiety and depression (Lei, 2010). In contrast to extrinsic motivation, the engagement of students who are intrinsically motivated comes from their own personal interests. An example of an intrinsic reward would be pride or a sense of achievement. For example, dancers tend to measure success by satisfaction as opposed to income and stability (Van Dyke, 2012). Students seeking the pleasure of recognition are extrinsically motivated. For dancers, an example of an extrinsic reward would be praise or compliments given for performing. Extrinsically motivated people

rely solely on rewards to serve as a catalyst for their motivation. Students can be motivated to learn almost anything as long as there is an attractive reward (Lei, 2010). The problem for teachers is finding a reward that will motivate all the students in the class. People can feel a connection with music, movies, or other people and use that as a motivator. Observing a peer succeed can often give the students a greater feeling of efficacy (Criss, 2011). Motivation can come in many forms when trying to reach a desired outcome. A college student can be interested in obtaining good grades, outperforming other classmates, or satisfying their instructors or parents (Lei, 2010). If an individual is not motivated at all, they may decide to discontinue an activity in what is called being amotivated (Sullivan & Strode, 2010). Motivation can be viewed based on three theoretical categories: reinforcement theories, content theories, and process theories (Criss, 2011).

Reinforcement theory is based on behavior being determined by rewards and consequences (Criss, 2011). Teachers use reinforcement theory by giving out candies, or prizes to students when they do a good job. An incentive is a reward that serves as a way of reinforcing or motivating. An incentive has no material value. Reinforcement theory focuses on factors external to the learner. Content theory focuses on human needs. If the needs of students are being met, they will respond in desired ways. It is recommended that to motivate a student the teacher should understand the student's needs (Criss, 2011). Once the teacher satisfies the needs of the student, the student will be moved toward self-actualization. Self-actualization in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy has been described as the desire to become what one is capable of becoming. Process theory focuses more on the intrinsic desire to improve personally. The value is placed on self-satisfaction rather than material rewards. Instructors who are skilled at

motivating will be able to encourage a student's feelings of autonomy and self-direction (Criss, 2011).

In these theories of motivation, emotions and beliefs are thought to evoke different patterns of behavior such as pursuit of mastery, failure avoidance, learned helplessness, and passive aggression (Seifert, 2004). In the academic context, four theories are prominent: self-efficacy theory, attribution, self-worth, and achievement goal theory. Student motivation involves a relationship between emotions and beliefs. Self-efficacy theory describes persons' or students' views of their ability to complete or perform a task. Self-efficacy is a perception of performance capability (Criss, 2011). Efficacious students will be more willing to try difficult tasks as opposed to students who feel incapable. Researchers have suggested that males engage in difficult tasks if they view themselves as being self-efficacious. Females, on the other hand, are inspired by challenging tasks only they feel they are important to them (Viera & Grantham, 2011). People who are not confident may avoid tasks that they find challenging (Seifert, 2004). A running concept of motivation is the importance of competence. In order to feel motivated, people must feel that they can accomplish a particular task (Sullivan & Strode, 2010). The feeling of competence can apply to dancers, because it motivates them to challenge themselves and enhance their skills. Unless students or people believe they can achieve satisfactory results by their actions, they have very little incentive to act (Viera & Grantham, 2011). As a teacher, it is important to believe that one's students can do well. If the teacher believes a student can do well, students may believe and success will follow (Criss, 2011). Two main variables of the SCCT model are self-efficacy and outcome expectations that are predictive of personal interests, goals, and career success (Conklin et al., 2012).

An attribution pertains to the perceived cause of an outcome. In reference to the educational setting, common attribution include effort, skills, knowledge, strategies, luck, and mood of the instructor (Seifert, 2004). Good examples of attribution would be scoring poorly on an examination because the student was feeling sick or lacked proper sleep. Students can assign different factors to attribute to their successes and failures, because humans are always trying to explain their behavior and understand why something happened (Criss, 2011). Students who attribute success and failure to internal causes are more likely to feel pride in their success and feel shame in their failures (Seifert, 2004). In contrast students who attribute success to external factors will not experience the same levels of satisfaction and self-esteem (Seifert, 2004). Students should be led to believe that their abilities can be developed. Competence is controllable and can change and expand over time (Criss, 2011).

Another theory behind motivation is the self-worth theory. The self-worth theory describes student motivation as attempts to maintain or increase self-worth (Seifert, 2004). To protect their self-worth, students will avoid putting themselves in situations with a risk of failure. There is a belief among the western culture that self-worth is correlated with performance. In other words, when individuals can do something well, they are considered worthy and are valued by others (Seifert, 2004). People do not like to try hard and fail. If students do not try hard and fail, they will just feel guilty that they did not prepare hard enough. However, when students try hard and fail, they will feel shame and humiliation. Students would much rather feel guilt than humiliation. Students are not only trying to avoid failure but they are applying strategies designed to avoid the implication of failure (Seifert, 2004). This can almost be seen as a defense mechanism to protect the image of the student.

Another factor that can contribute to a student's motivation is the need to achieve goals. In achievement goal theory, students are academically motivated by their desire to achieve goals (Seifert, 2004). These are students who work hard because they believe their success is directly tied to how much effort they put forth. Therefore, success can be achieved by a controllable factor. Self-efficacy can influence goal pursuit. Goals serve to focus attention and effort on relevant activities. Goals also have a positive effect on persistence (Sullian & Strode, 2010). For dancers, goals can force them to learn new skills to actually assist them in goal attainment. Perceptions of self-assuredness and control are shown to be predictive of performance goal and work avoidant behavior (Seifert, 2004). In general, students who feel confident or have a sense of control will typically perceive meaning in their academic work (Seifert, 2004). High levels of self-efficacy lead to more involvement and engagement. A goal that is considered important will require greater effort and commitment to achieve it (Viera & Grantham, 2011). High levels of engagement can lead to mastery type behavior. Mastery goals encourage deeper engagement and learning (Frichtel, 2012). As a mastery student, the student will display self-determination. Setting and meeting goals will render a feeling of satisfaction for task completion. Two categories of goal orientation define success: task-focused and ego-focused orientation. Task-focused is associated with perceptions of competence, task mastery, and improvement in performance. Ego orientation emphasizes comparison with others and a focus on winning (Pickard & Bailey, 2009).

Unlike a student with a high level of confidence, a student with learned helplessness typically is less engaged because of feelings such as being incapable or incompetent (Seifert, 2004). Another type of student behavior being displayed is when a student is considered smart

or intelligent but is bored with the material. Bored students do not apply themselves because they feel that the work has little relevance or value to them. However, unlike students with low self-efficacy that believe they cannot complete tasks, smart students who are bored still believe they are capable of doing the work (Seifert, 2004).

Motivated people anticipate likely outcomes, set goals, and work toward valued futures (Bandura, 1989). To have persistence and scholastic achievement, the two essential factors needed are ability and effort (Kappe & Flier, 2012). An optimistic self-appraisal of an individual's capabilities can raise their aspirations in ways that enable them to get the most from their talent (Bandura, 1989). Crystallizing experiences are memorable moments when people become aware of their own capabilities. The people who experience such moments display greater self-efficacy, self-awareness, commitment, and a positive identity as a dancer (Chua, 2013). Dancers describe such powerful events with enthusiasm and excitement. Such experiences can act as a catalyst for dancers to inspire them to begin taking more lessons or take their activity more seriously (Pickard & Bailey, 2009). Such memorable events can yield a long term change in the individual. For dancers crystalizing experiences often signal greater commitment, motivation and identity. The crystalizing experience is similar but not identical to the "aha" experience. The difference being that the "aha" experience may occur as a single moment and the crystalizing experience may be part of an ongoing process (Pickard & Bailey, 2009). Student may have epiphanies when they decide on what career path they want to follow. Other terms associated with these types of experiences are triggering events and transformative experiences. Individuals discover their abilities and can have a sudden moment of insight and realization that sets them on their career path (Pickard & Bailey, 2009). Not all crystalizing

experiences are positive. A dance student can, however, have a moment of failure and use the setback and disappointment as motivation to come back and try again.

### Academic Commitment

Dancers are committed mainly because they believe in their own ability. Students demonstrating a strong commitment to their majors do so because they feel a strong emotional identification with their field of study. Students will likely develop confidence within their field of study and stay committed to finishing their degrees (Conklin et al., 2012). Meyer and Allen's model suggests that there are several forms of commitment. People can remain committed to their jobs for numerous reasons. The model suggests that employees displaying affective commitment remain with companies because they feel an emotional attachment to it. Those with continuance commitment remain with a company because they feel it would be too costly to leave. People who display normative commitment believe that they should stay because they are obligated to do so (Conklin et al., 2012). In relation to SCCT, students who feel a strong commitment to their majors are likely to appraise their experiences positively. Students who emotionally identify with their degrees also feel comfortable setting goals and making plans for future careers in their field (Conklin et al., 2012).

As children, we are asked what we want to be when we grow up. In high school and college, students are confronted with choosing a major. The decision is a complex process that involves career exploration and comparing alternatives (Germeijs, Luyckx, Notelaers, Goossens, & Versschueren, 2012). Students reflect on their interests and skills and align them with a major that best fits their interests. People form their own identities based on their goals, and



values. All students are different in the way they go about deciding on their major. Students believe that colleges and universities will prepare them for their transition into adulthood. Educational choices at a young age can be seen as activities that help mold the process of constructing one's career identity. Some students may be highly committed to their majors without even researching alternatives, but others may explore at higher levels and still second guess their choices (Germeijs et al., 2012). Students also decide the level of commitment to exploring possible majors and careers. Broad exploration refers to learning about the self and possible careers, and in-depth exploration refers to learning about a reduced set of career alternatives that are aligned with the individual (Germeijs et al., 2012). There is much thought that goes into deciding on a major and many consequences that can appear if the choice is perceived to be wrong. There is a high level of uncertainty and questions will remain unclear in the heads of students deciding on their possible future career.

### Social Support

Although there is not a widely accepted definition of social support, support can be categorized by type. Support can be grouped as emotional, informational or instrumental (Chua, 2015). An example of emotional support can be parents attending their child's dance performances. Informational support can be described as advice or guidance given to the student. An example of instrumental support is providing money or transportation for dance students to accommodate their dance training (Chua, 2015). Gaining support from various sources makes a difference in development of a dancer. Social support also produces health benefits (Marr & Wilcox, 2015). Receiving support from teachers, mentors, parents, and

financial resources are a key element to talent development. Bloom, according to Chua (2015) observed that parents and teachers play critical roles in the phases of talent development. Male adolescent dancers have communicated that their mothers have been the most supportive individuals of their dancing (Risner, 2014).

Dancers reported sensing social support from the university and other people who were involved in dance related activities (Chua, 2013). Other people can inspire dancers to commit and support their career choices. The support of a dance family or community cannot be underestimated. Dance teachers are as important to dance students as sport coaches are to athletes (Van Rossum, 2004). Development of talent is a tribute of the support of many people and communities (Chua, 2015). Students thrive on social support. Bandura stated that a major source of self-efficacy comes from people being persuaded to believe that they are capable and have the skills to succeed through verbal encouragement from others (Pickard & Bailey, 2009). The example of verbal persuasion or encouragement is a form of emotional support. When the encouragement comes from a trusted source such as a teacher, this can lead to increased beliefs in the student's capabilities (Chua, 2015). For dancers, having repetitive rehearsals, clear goals, and receiving feedback from their instructors or choreographers enhances their confidence (Chua, 2013).

Commitment to dance training typically begins at an early age. Dancers sacrifice other areas of their lives such as friendships, other interests, and experiences just to dance (Pickard & Bailey, 2009). In addition to what individuals think of their own ability, the judgment of others can also cause students conflict. There is pressure to conform to popular demands and public standards. Dance students are aware of the outsider status by which members of society

visualize most artists (Alter, 1997). Not only are there many factors that can contribute to an individual selecting a career, there are also factors that can decide if an individual even attends college.

### Aspirations

Researchers have shown that parental encouragement, socioeconomic status, and student ability are all related to a student's aspirations to go to college. Direct family involvement can encourage students and create shared ownership of the aspiration (Dyce et al., 2013). Positive encouragement by parents, guardians, siblings and other relatives leads to greater educational aspirations (Davis, Amelink, Hirt, & Miyazaki, 2012). Factors such as social capital can help children's life chances. Family social capital can be measured by indicators such as expectation of children going to college and frequency of discussions with parents about academics.

Researchers have also shown that students whose mothers have high educational expectations of them were less likely to drop out of high school (Byun, Meece, Irvin, & Hutchins, 2012). Family social capital positively shapes college enrollment. As challenges and barriers differ across cultures, so do aspirations. For example, a student living in a rural area may have different challenges and aspirations than a student living in an urban area. Students from rural areas face limited access to higher education due to geographic isolation, and parents of children in rural areas have lower educational expectations than parents in urban areas (Byun et al., 2012).

Family social capital influence social outcomes. Rural youth may only have aspirations of maintaining their family lifestyle.

In addition to social capital, gender can also influence educational aspirations. Education is associated with power; hence, the more education the more financial opportunity and power that is accrued in society (Davis et al., 2012). The effect of gender on earning power was clearly displayed in the 2000 U.S. census where men consistently earned more than women at each educational level. In general, women of color do not have as many opportunities to be mentored or form academic partnerships. This can be a challenge and may lead women of color to be deterred from pursuing activities that are associated with greater academic success. Engaging with others and building networks is critical for success in higher education. Socialization reinforces student aspirations (Davis et al., 2012). Family, friends, and faculty can all influence educational aspirations. However, family influences can differ by race, ethnicity, and gender. Encouragement and advice between parents and children can vary based on gender. Faculty spending time with their students or taking an interest in their students can impact a student's goals. Faculty who take an interest in students serve as a positive predictor for higher degree aspirations in women (Davis et al., 2012). In addition to family and faculty, strong peer networks also contribute to positive reinforcement for women and students of color. There are very few studies that focus primarily on women and educational aspirations. High level dance performers do not reach that level alone. There are always significant others to offer support and advice (Pickard & Bailey, 2009). As dance majors, some students will encounter additional barriers that other non-dance majors may not.

### Social Factors

Negative perceptions of dancers and dance education can also affect the way students feel about pursuing dance. For male dancers, overcoming the social stigma of dance and masculinity can also present added pressure. Male dance students spend a great deal of time thinking about male and female body postures along with image (Hagood, 2007). In American culture, dance is closely associated with the female body (Conger, 2015). Mannerisms and image are all part of sexual identification. If males actually do cross gender boundaries, they receive negative sanctions from other males more often than do females. Boys who want to attempt a career in dance may feel alienated or excluded by their peers (Pickard & Bailey, 2009). In 2009, 61% of dance students who graduated with a bachelor's degree in visual and performing arts were female (Siebens & Ryan, 2012). Boys are more reluctant than girls to interact in cross-gender groups, because boys view girls as lower status. Ironically, as young adolescents, school dances have been seen as a normal way to encourage gender integration. It is a time when youngsters mature sexually and culture stresses heterosexual relationships (Pellegrini & Long, 2007). Similar to gender segregation in childhood, men are pressured to stay away from activities comprised of mostly women in fear of being characterized as a woman. Risner (2002) noted that in the mid-nineteenth century male dancers started to experience prejudice. Attempts to encourage young boys or teenagers to pursue dance is quickly followed with negative derogatory stereotypes of gay dancers (Risner, 2002). Involvement in dance for men means underlying homosexual assumptions. Research indicates that 50% of male dancers in the United States are in fact homosexual. Male homosexual dance students are vulnerable to gendered criticism and homophobic attitudes (Risner, 2002).

Heterosexual male dance students are also targets for gendered criticism (Risner, 2002). The feminist condemnation can lead to an invisible tension. The term, sissy, is sometimes associated with male dancers, meaning that the males are regarded as weak or effeminate (Conger, 2015). So, for males choosing to participate in dance, they will endure the additional pressure of going against traditional gender norms. Male dancers somehow do not meet society's definition on traditional masculinity. In the Western European paradigm, dance is primarily considered a female art form (Risner, 2007). Thus, due to dance being viewed as a feminine activity, dancing males are always in danger of being classified as effeminate (Risner, 2014). Dance is not associated with "normal" males (Pickard & Bailey, 2009). Dances such as ballet, modern, and jazz are considered for girls using gender stereotypes. What society deems as socially acceptable behavior for boys and girls plays an important role in students' attitudes regarding dance. In our society, people assume that a narrow range of behavior is normal and that heterosexuality is a dominant standard (Risner, 2014).

Embarrassment, humiliation, and having to prove heterosexuality over and over again can cause a stressful and threatening environment (Risner, 2002). Bullying is a universal action that has no cultural boundaries. Over the past 10 years, bullying victimization has been recognized as an adolescent health issue throughout the world (Risner, 2014). Homophobic attitudes and feminine stereotypes are social pressures which are part of a greater cultural ideology for male dancers (Risner, 2007). Adolescents who are part of the sexual minority are more likely to be physically abused or threatened. Boys are especially at risk of bullying if they are perceived as or identify as non-heterosexual (Risner, 2014). Thus, the negative interactions that males incur

with dancing can make them question the choices they made and may cause them to avoid the negative environment by discontinuing dance.

Women can also face social rejection based on the style of dance they elect to study. If a female dances and moves in a sexual manner or exposes too much of her body, the dance can be considered risqué. Females can open themselves up to receive dirty looks, endure rude behavior or judgmental comments based on their dancing. A perfect example of a style of dance that is often compared to erotic dancing is belly dancing. The key movements in belly dance such as shimmies, and moving the hips and torso has been considered morally offensive (Kraus, 2010). Belly dancing as well as performing burlesque has become linked with erotic dance and sex work. The association and comparisons between belly dancers and strippers still persists to this day. The costumes that belly dancers wear (e.g., decorated bras, skirts, displaying a visible stomach), can contribute to the judgments made against them (Kraus, 2010). Even hula dancing can be seen as an erotic form of dance. The hula dance is much more than a folk dance resembling an exotic dance. The hula is a unique dance of the Hawaiian people which describes the history, religious beliefs, and philosophies of the people (Rowe, 2008). To manage conflict or avoid being stigmatized, many dancers hide the fact that they dance. If for example, the general public found out a female was a belly dancer, her reputation could potentially be damaged.

Stigmatization can lower a person's quality of life and lead to feelings of low self-esteem, depression, isolation, and shame (Kraus, 2010). Some strategies that are employed to cope with negative perceptions include avoidance or withdrawal from the general population of people who do not accept or support the individual's lifestyle choice. Engaging in secrecy for dancers would

be to separate their lives into groups of people who are aware of their dancing characteristics and others who do not find it acceptable. Slight forms of rejection, name calling, and being ridiculed are forms of behavior that can discourage someone from claiming affiliation to a social group (Kraus, 2010). Dance students become part of a social world that has a sub culture of people who share the same norms and values. This gives the individual an identity and a feeling of belonging. Dance students build relationships with other dancers and share their abilities as they work toward achieving their goals. It is important to see how the dance student population handles unfavorable perceptions and stress to preserve and achieve their academic goals.

Pressure to change majors can come from parents, friends, even internally from the student. The lack of support for dance students can be due to the stigma of dance being considered a voluntary leisure activity. Parents paying for college may not be thrilled when their child decides to enroll as a dance major. It may be difficult for students and parents to comprehend how a degree in personal experience will translate into a base for significant employment (Carter, 1984). Even with a deep love of dance, studies reveal that students have a fairly pessimistic attitude toward their future in dance (Alter, 1997). As students and families increasingly share more of the cost for higher education, the quality of the educational experience and return on investment are increasingly more important. Students and parents want to reap the full benefits of their investment in education. As customers, they seek results and quality that far exceed the price they incurred for the service (Scholder & Maquire, 2009).

Participation in dance can be influenced in many ways by the student's family. Parents who are actively involved in their children's education at an early age have the ability through discussions to exert influence. Through parent-child discussions parents can share their values,



and preferences which in time can shape a child's aspirations (Ma, 2009). Parents can also spend time through discussion focusing on jobs or majors on which they have had personal experiences in. Children are more likely to gravitate or be interested in the fields their parents place emphasis on. To children, parents can define what is desirable, attainable, and important (Ma, 2009). In previous studies, dance students describe a lack of encouragement from others as a negative aspect of their dance experience (Alter, 1997). A family's socioeconomic status can also play a crucial role in the decision making process of choosing a major. Families from a lower socioeconomic class may not be able to afford the risk of sending children to college for a career with uncertain job prospects. Prospects for a career in dance are not as financially promising as those in medicine or law (Carter, 1984). Low-income students may be motivated by the desire to improve their financial situation when deciding on a major. Extrinsic motivation can place a higher priority on economic advancement and economic success. In an upper class household, students may have more flexibility to choose a less lucrative college major. Students from high-income and well educated families seem to have a higher probability of graduating than those from less affluent households (Donhardt, 2012). In general, students who persevere to their final year of college have invested a great deal of time, effort, and financial resources in their education. Students who fail to meet their degree requirements are often left with debt and diminished career prospects. For many researchers, graduation outcomes are the essential measure of academic success, and degree completion is the ultimate indicator of academic achievement (Donhardt, 2012).

Another challenge facing dance students is the lack of diversity in their dance curriculum. Dance schools in the private sector need to do a better job of including more multicultural dances

in their curriculum. Outside of teaching one semester of African dance, most higher education programs do not do a good job of including multicultural dances. This is where it becomes difficult for minority cultures in the United States to identify with dance programs because the programs are biased. More needs to be done to provide exposure and cultivate appreciation of dance to other cultures. Under representation of minority dancers at major international companies continues to be a theme (Risner & Stinson, 2010). Faculty who push multicultural efforts can be labeled as difficult or activist. Students are made to believe that certain dance styles are to be embraced. In addition, dance programs such as traditional ballet are offered more than newer multicultural dances (Risner & Stinson, 2010). Focusing primarily on traditional dances can be interpreted by students as a rejection of their cultural backgrounds. There is a real challenge for dance departments to offer more diversity in the curriculum. Many dance students are accepting of the system, but there are others who are turned-off (McCarthy-Brown, 2011). More needs to be done outside of cultural hybridity which, in this case, is the merging of two different cultures of dance styles (Smith, 2008). Cultural dances need their own classes to be offered. Consequently, students may not feel a connection to their identity and culture with the curriculum. The cycle will continue as dance instructors and choreographers tend to teach what they have learned or teach from their own cultural characteristics (Smith, 2008). There is a great deal of support in dance education for the more traditional dances such as ballet and modern dance. The current approach can seem exclusive, and some cultures of students may feel that they do not measure up (McCarthy-Brown, 2011). Parental pressure can even be cultural with some not recognizing dance education as a real form of education.

Participation in dance for males and females can also be influenced by traditional cultural views. In general, minority groups such as Native American, Hispanics, Asians, and African American students have been underrepresented in dance education. African Americans have made strides in the performance culture. However, in postsecondary education, academia has not kept pace (Kerr-Berry, 2012). The African American culture for years has been denied dignity, rights, privilege, and opportunities because of whites (Atencio & Wright, 2009). Traditional African dances are seen as more primitive, wild, and undisciplined compared to the very structured dances of the western culture. In other words, African dances are perceived inferior because they lack technicality. Black dance students are made to feel by their peers and dance instructors that African dances are uncivilized, whereas ballet sits at the top of the dance hierarchy (Atencio & Wright, 2009). Ballet dominates the cultural image of dance in western society (Zitomer & Reid, 2011). Unlike other areas in society, dance education has found much resistance and challenges trying to diversify its faculty and students (Kerr-Berry, 2012).

Even though dances such as ballet are not considered a white art form many ballet companies still remain white (Kerr-Berry, 2012). Dance instructors and faculty are primarily white. The lack of diversity in higher education dance programs creates a culture. Some African Americans may resist seeking out a dance degree because of what they might consider as a racist past. The integration of cultural dances into the dance curriculum thus far has been minimal. The curricula practices at the current time have not successfully acknowledged the assumptions of white superiority (Kerr-Berry, 2012). Dance programs are in need diversity initiatives to make the programs more appealing to students of all cultures. Data gathered by Risner on African American participation in undergraduate dance programs reveals that only 10%

participate as opposed to 72% participation by whites (Kerr-Berry, 2012). Middle class white students can afford dance lessons and will not be turned away based on skin color. Because postsecondary education is a white-dominated system, African Americans as well as other cultures can feel disadvantaged. As long as the gap widens between blacks and whites it would be hard to see African American students even considering graduating with a degree in dance (Kerr-Berry, 2012).

Another difference between African Americans and Caucasians can be the natural figure of the body. The average body type of an African American female can very different from the body type of a Caucasian female. Some black females are chastised for having a big butt and are forced to tuck in their pelvises while taking dance classes (Atencio & Wright, 2009). Being constantly corrected or chastised for having a different body type can definitely add to the pressure of trying to fit in and can cause feelings of being inferior. The physical appearance of black dance student does not fit the stereotypical mold of a dancer (Atencio & Wright, 2009). Under harsh criticism, ridicule, and contempt, it becomes clear why the black culture may avoid investing in dance programs. A dance studio is filled with mirrors, and the mirrors only magnify self-awareness (Dearborn, Haring, Young, & O'Rourke, 2006). Dancers shaped differently than the majority of the other dancers may feel some body image anxiety. Dearborn et al. (2006) also showed that women's sense of efficacy was lower when they exercised in front of a mirror. Similarly mirrored classrooms and the type of clothing worn by college dance students are associated with body dissatisfaction. Studies show that fat talk and body shaming can lead to harmful consequences for students (Kartawidjaja & Cordero, 2013). Because dancers express their art thru their body, they can be at high risk for body dissatisfaction. In 2005, a study

revealed that 83% of weight pressure came from college dancers hearing their peers comment on another dancer's weight (Kartawidjaja & Cordero, 2013). Whether it is sports or dancing, to some people the body defines who should be participating. Perceiving differences between students can cause stressful conditions.

Students of color may see themselves as being different and it may affect their confidence or performing ability. The ballroom is the site for problematic whiteness, where whiteness is made to feel universal and normative and the racial other is made exotic and sexual (Bosse, 2007). Humans relate to or identify with characteristics or beliefs that are similar to their own culture, and dance uses the human body as a major source of communication which embodies culture, history, and unique qualities of a society (Smith, 2008).

### Cultural Views

Dance is composed of different gestures, postures, and movements most characteristic to the everyday, and thus is crucial in cultural continuity (Smith, 2008). The cultural embodiment of some dances reflects the experiences of cultural backgrounds, origins, family, and weather (Smith, 2008). Dance has evolved being necessary in people's lives in ancient cultures to its current representation as cultural and artistic field (Zitomer & Reid, 2011). Different countries and cultures have different perceptions of dance. Some countries may have a history of looking down on dancers while other countries may have a more favorable opinion. For example, in Taiwan dance has never been considered serious business; and dancing as a profession was considered to be a low profession due to bias against bodily movements (Tai, 2011). In the case of the United Kingdom, dance programs have only been around for the last 35 years due to the

unwillingness to value dance as a way of knowing or body of knowledge (Bannon, 2010). In Greece, job opportunities for dancers and dance teachers is very limited (Tsompnaki & Benn, 2011). The ambiguous views of dancing lead people to consider dance as just vacation entertainment or a fitness fad. Negative perceptions can be formed when the limitations of a career in dance are very clear. This is an example of how different social behaviors, family attitudes, and values can influence the youth and impact their decision to seek dance education.

Dance education in Africa began being taught at colleges and universities only 50 years ago (Musmon et al., 2008). Dance has is a very big part of the African culture and is used as a way to express national pride. In some aspects, the abundant presence of dance outside the classroom setting works against the institutionalization of dance (Musmon et al., 2008). Africa is already low on resources, so an argument can be made as to why funding for a formal dance education is necessary. The same argument for dance education can be found in the United States. In the country of Haiti, it was once considered offensive for women to wear shorts or pants, but now it is common to see girls in tight jeans and halter tops while participating in festivities (Musmon et al., 2008). There has also been a change in music where more common pop music can be heard over the traditional style of music in Haiti.

In Saudi Arabia, Islam places restrictions on men and women dancing together (Musmon et al., 2008), and it is more common to see dance performances with only men or only women. Traditional folk dances have been passed down through the generations and are commonly performed at weddings. The dance restrictions in the Saudi Arabian culture are a prime example of how cultures view the art of dance differently. In Hungary, dance has a history that goes back as early as the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period (Musmon et al., 2008). The traditional

Hungarian dances were quite different from the dances of the Saudi Arabian culture. The Hungarian dances included leaping dances, maiden rounds, lyrical elements, and some included props.

Kathak is a classical form of dance that embodies many aspects of the Indian culture; the term, Kathak, is the Indian word for storyteller. In Indian culture, practicing art forms have become popular. Kathak embodies elements of sacred and long-established beliefs, and stories of Gods, and myths from ancient scriptures (Smith, 2008). In Korea, traditional folk dances are very close to the lives of the people. The folk dances originated in prayers for good crops in shaman rituals or evolved from communal forms of entertainment (You, 2009). In many cases, dance is a way to express heritage, cultural, and spiritual traditions. It is also common to see dancing during a variety of rituals or festive occasions.

In Cuba, there is a shortage of many items such as paper, pens, internet, expert publishing companies, and texts. The television provides limited stations in Cuba, and the stations do not promote dance (Angert, 2001). There is little motivation for companies to print text on dance, and imported material may be too expensive for Cubans to purchase (Angert, 2001). Some dance pieces were even banned before they could debut due to censorship. However, in spite of all these challenges, there are a number of dance scholars in Cuba. One of the most well-known dance researchers in Cuba is Ramiro Guerra. In the 1960s, he wrote a book that was meant to give an understanding and appreciation for dance (Angert, 2001). The people of Cuba receive a very filtered education when it comes to dance. This does not mean that the Cuban people do not dance because they do dance Afro-Cuban and other cultural dances. Because of its close ties

to the USSR in the mid 1900s, Cuba has one of the better ballet companies in the world. In fact ballet is one of the focused areas of dance research in Cuba (Angert, 2001).

Another country with very little research on dance is Italy. If someone were to go to Italy with the intent on doing research on dance, he or she would find no specialized dance library (Sparti & Veroli, 1995). In spite of the growing interest of dance research in Italy, the challenge has always been lack of resources. No courses or degrees in dance were offered at any university in Italy until the late 1990s. Even though Italy has been in the forefront of dance for many years, there is still very little institutional or government support for dance research (Sparti & Veroli, 1995). Receiving degrees in art history or philosophy has rarely led to finding a job in those fields. That is why receiving a degree in dance and deciding on dance as a career is almost inconceivable in Italy.

Hula dancing has been marketed as a gym fad or as a great way to exercise (Rowe, 2008). However, the hula dance is actually a very unique dance of the Hawaiian people. The perception of the hula dance is that it is just mere entertainment or just people swaying their hips. Tourists just see the hula dance as vacation entertainment or just a part of a luau. But the reality is hula dancing is not just a Hawaiian folk dance, but on the contrary it is comprised of social and natural history (Rowe, 2008). The dance itself can preserve the culture's values. As with the Hula, the dance embodies the beliefs, literature, and scientific knowledge of the Hawaiian people. The hula of today encompasses 300 years of intermingling (Rowe, 2008). The sense of pride affiliated with the hula dance is part of Hawaiian heritage.



### Student Experience

The experiences and motivations of students who participate in dance classes are the best ways to articulate and conceptualize to others the value of dance education. A study of young dance students ranging in ages 14 to 26 from different dance backgrounds was conducted to find out experiences of dance students and motivations for attending dance classes (Gardner, Komesaroff, & Fensham, 2008). The results of the study produced major themes in which participants of the study derived meaning from the dance class experience. It was reported that dance students believed they gained expertise and respect for physical activity. Also participants in dance classes stated they gained self-confidence with their body and social relationships.

In another study, dance students praised their experience, noting they developed important character traits such as discipline, perseverance, and responsibility (Alter, 1997). Dancing has the power to engage students physically, intellectually, and spiritually. Dancers also describe performing as a feeling of a natural high in which they have the opportunity to express themselves (Alter, 1997). Performing is an experience that has been described as rewarding, satisfying, and worthwhile. In addition, dance students report themselves as more goal-oriented than their non-dancer peers (Alter, 1997). The dance classes themselves served as a way for students to increase respect between older and younger people in the context of physical activity. The site of the dance class served as a place where students explored or maintained social, cultural, intersubjective values. Lastly, students believed that participating in dance classes involved experiences of self, body, and world that lie outside the everyday (Gardner et al., 2008).

Students also experience other emotions such as having a sense of community and competition. The sense of competition challenges the students to keep striving and will keep them from becoming lazy (Alter, 1997). Competition can come in the form of fellow dancers or outside forces which can prevent them from ever being successful dancers. For some, the student experience can be negative when receiving criticism. Other are enriched by considering the viewpoints of others (Alter, 1997). The sense of community felt by students comes from their fellow dance peers and their instructors. Dance students can go on to be dancers, studio owners, or dance instructors. Dance students have mixed emotions about becoming dance instructors. Many students are ambivalent about teaching because their dance teachers are dancers who could not succeed in dance professionally, exemplifying old adage in the dance community is “those who can, do; those who can’t teach” (Alter, 1997). There are so many different views and a wide variety of experiences that dance students encounter. Dance programs must match the student’s abilities. Some dance students only want to be professional performers, but other types of dance students will be more interested in scholarly dance work such as research and writing (Carter, 1984). For the many students who ultimately want to become a dance professional, more steps need to be in place to make sure these students reach successful outcomes. The amount of time and rigor spent on dance training in higher education has led to shortcomings in developing practitioners as teachers, scholars, choreographers, and entrepreneurs (Pulinkala, 2013).

With increasing numbers of aspiring young dancers, it is important for higher education to make sure that dance students are successful. In Australia, between the years 2003 and 2007, there was a rise of 30% in the number of postgraduate dance students (Bennett, 2009). The

growing number of students is indicative of how dance has gained popularity in general. Results of a study conducted in Australia that asked dance students to rate the effectiveness of their dance education and training showed three major themes. Asking students for feedback provides a way to investigate student satisfaction. Students stated they wanted more information on career awareness and development, training in different genres, and changes to course structure (Bennett, 2009). Some survey responses stated that the curriculum should have offered classes for the business side of being a dance artist; other responses wanted to see how to use the skills gained in the curriculum applied to the real world (Bennett, 2009). Recognizing the needs of dance students is crucial to success of dance education. Students who participated in the study specifically wanted to be made aware of the real world of work and not be sold a dream (Bennett, 2009). Some suggestions regarding the curriculum were to add some career management or small business courses to incorporate other skills to the dance program (Bennett, 2009). These additional courses would be important to a student who desires to one day operate or manage a dance company. Students will only engage in these additional courses if they believe the classes have relevance to their future lives (Bennett, 2009). However, if dance students wish to open a dance business, they need to have the skills after graduation to find a need in the community and be able to satisfy that need.

To actually become a dance instructor or to operate a successful dance business means the dance curriculum in college should pass the necessary skills and training to its students. This is a prominent issue with dance teachers who are highly trained but less than prepared (Risner & Anderson, 2012). Studies show a high percentage of dancers want to become dance teachers in the future, but many have little experience teaching dance (Alter, 1997). A typical education for

a dancer fails to instruct about the rest of the world, and dance artists are often ill-equipped to speak for themselves among non-dancers (Van Dyke, 2012). Responses from a survey conducted by Bennett suggest that students want to know the realities of working life and the limited performance opportunities (Bennett, 2009). The same survey suggests that students would like more training on teaching practices, or credits that would count towards a teaching qualification, and some respondents mentioned wanting small business skills or training to be an entrepreneur (Bennett, 2009). Dance artists specifically commented that there is a gap between expectation and reality. Suggestions offered in the same study by dancers were for more career awareness and development (37%), training in different areas (37%), and changes in course structure (26%). Qualitative comments from the study indicate that the realities of practice can come as a shock to the student. Even with the growing awareness of career challenges, student expectations still do not mirror reality. One respondent stated that he/she did not comprehend living a life not knowing what he/she would be doing in six months' time (Bennett, 2009).

One of the goals for dance education should be to include increasing career prospects and employment opportunities and create sustainable careers for dance students. This implies that career goals or success for performing arts students should be redefined not as a performance career but as a career that is sustainable (Bennett, 2009). When a dance career comes to an end, the individual will face a future of uncertainty. The challenges facing a dancer during the time of career transition include loss of income and having to give up something that has been important in their life for such a long time (Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). Dancers can go from dancing in the greatest theaters to working minimum wage jobs after their dance careers are over. The Liberal Education for Arts Professionals (LEAP) program is a bachelor's degree program that offers

former dance performers a chance to transition into a post-performing career (Lamoreaux & Taylor, 2008). The program is successful because it understands that dancers spend enormous amounts of time training at an early age and have little time for other interests. The program also tries to remove barriers by creating access and providing an accommodating schedule, location, cost, and time to degree for their students (Lamoreaux & Taylor, 2008). It seems that incorporating other courses or focuses in the dance curriculum can prevent dancers from having to start over after their performance career comes to an end. At the time of entry, students may not realize what they want to get out of a dance program. But after completing the program the more knowledgeable student seems to want a more student centered environment where student interest can drive the curriculum.

### Career Expectations

Careers in dance are non-linear. Employment may not be continuous or can be overlapping (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015). This is in direct opposition to more traditional careers where it is possible to work with a single employer for a long term. Jobs in dance can rely on contacts and quality of previous work. More traditional jobs will require a formal application process (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015). These realities are items that a high school student or freshman in college many not understand because they are lacking career awareness. In a study conducted in Australia, incoming dance students were asked what they expected to be doing two years after graduation; 60% expected to be working as a professional company dancer. In the same study, 54% of students expected to be traveling internationally or nationally (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015). The qualitative researcher from this study questioned several students after

their graduation to ask them if their previous career expectations have been met. Adrian was a dance student from the study who had been working outside of dance. It had been over 12 months since he earned income from dance. He stated that he was not prepared for such big employment gaps (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015). Big gaps in employment make it harder to continue to train in dance as well as make it difficult to support oneself financially. Laura was another student who participated in the study. She worked in the dance sector on short term contracts. Laura stated that she felt underprepared by the unpredictable nature of dance work and the traveling lifestyle (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015).

Disillusionment in college can also have students feeling underprepared. When first year students have unrealistic optimistic expectations of college, they experience what is called the freshman myth (Kreig, 2013). New social norms, new social freedoms, new identity, and new peer groups can be a difficult adjustment for students in college as well as in the workforce (Kreig, 2013). Incoming freshman may go to college leaving behind a support system. Similarly, a college graduate may leave behind a support system for as they begin their careers. With dance occupations being limited, moving or relocating for a job can very much be a possibility.

#### Similar Studies

The individual experience is important because it provides real data and gives an accurate view of what opportunities or challenges were faced by the dancer. Researchers (Cornell & Hansen, 1976) queried four dancers as to their dance background and their present type of career. The primary objective of the study was to help generate a better understanding of what it is like

to become a professional dancer. The study did a good job of comparing the different paths taken by the individuals.

The first dancer to discuss his experience was Mark. Mark started dancing at six, and he was the only boy dancing in an all-girl ballet class (Cornell & Hansen, 1976). In school, others would tease Mark about taking ballet classes and call him twinkle toes. Mark had made up his mind that he wanted to become a professional dancer and attended a special high school rich in performing arts (Cornell & Hansen, 1976). After high school, Mark auditioned for a professional job where there were 100 dancers auditioning for one job. He did not get that job, but after several auditions Mark finally got a low paying job with a ballet company (Cornell & Hansen, 1976).

Another student experience was that of a woman named Carol who had started taking ballet classes at age eight. Carol would go on to take dance class after high school three days a week (Cornell & Hansen, 1976). Her first job was part-time at a drug store. She later accepted a job with a Canadian ballet company. After performing for about 15 years, she retired as a performer and started her own dance school at age 35 (Cornell & Hansen, 1976).

When Mike was approximately nine years old, his mother started taking him to dance classes on the weekends. In high school he was involved in musical productions, more specifically, dance routines for the musicals. After high school, Mike attended college as a fine arts major. During his time in college, he studied theater, acting, singing, and dancing. During college, Mike was able to find work as a singing waiter at resorts (Cornell & Hansen, 1976). Once he graduated with his bachelor's degree, he auditioned for many shows in New York City. After many auditions, Mike finally was hired and has worked as a performer since.

Unlike the previous examples, Janice did not take dance classes at an early age. She was in college, majoring in Spanish, when she became interested in folk dancing. During college, she took some time off and spent her free time folk dancing. During her time away from college, she was offered a chance to join a performance group as a non-paid dancer. Janice turned down the offer to join the dance group in order to finish her Spanish degree (Cornell & Hansen, 1976). After graduating, she decided she did not want to teach Spanish. So she took a daytime office job, and at night she danced for a folk dance ensemble.

The final experience in the comparison was Laurie's. Laurie began dancing ballet at age eight. She grew up dancing and was considered a child prodigy (Cornell & Hansen, 1976). However, in college, Laurie began to have other career interests, specifically in psychology. When she heard about the occupation of dance therapist, she thought she had found a job that met all of her interests. However, after receiving her master's degree in psychomotor therapy, she was only able to find a low paying job as an assistant occupational therapist. A job as a dance therapist was impossible for Laurie to find because only the largest hospitals employed dance therapists.

In a similar study, Montgomery and Robinson (2002) set out to document information on dance student's employment history after graduation. The purpose of this study was to learn what happens to students who major in dance after they graduate—whether dance majors were able to sustain dance careers or if they needed to hold non-dance jobs to survive financially. The interviews in this study were conducted in the spring of 2000. In total, 12 respondents agreed to be interviewed. Following are some of the personal stories that they shared during their interviews.



Rebecca Chisman stated that she was able to dance consistently on tour in New York after graduation. She considered herself fortunate to be working regularly, while others she knew could only find employment sporadically (Montgomery & Robinson, 2002). Rebecca has been unable to support herself solely as a dancer. She spent some time waiting on tables and teaching Pilates. However, Rebecca is the happiest when she is on tour dancing (Montgomery & Robinson, 2002).

Marylloyd Claytor studied dance and music at Mount Holyoke College (Montgomery & Robinson, 2002). After graduating from Mount Holyoke College, Marylloyd attended New York University and was enrolled in the dance program. She found it very difficult to find non dance jobs that were flexible and permitted her to attend her classes. She also has never been able to support herself solely as a dancer. When she moved to New York, she began doing dance jobs but earned very little from them. As her financial situation became desperate, Marylloyd had to relocate to Pittsburg to live with family (Montgomery & Robinson, 2002). In Pittsburg, Marylloyd became a substitute music teacher and also opened her own dance company. Her dance company constantly ran a deficit, but Marylloyd had no regrets about the path she had chosen. She believes that students studying dance should be better prepared and educated on how to survive economically in the dance world (Montgomery & Robinson, 2002). She even suggested that a business course be part of the dance curriculum.

Rick Guimond has continued dancing professionally even into his 40s (Montgomery & Robinson, 2002). He dances for the Eleanor Coleman Dance Ensemble in New York City. Rick is fortunate because he earns pay for his practices as well as shows performed. Rick even owned his own dance company for a period of time but had to give it up to work full time as a legal

assistant (Montgomery & Robinson, 2002). Rick has taken on many non-dance jobs to help pay some debts and support his dancing. As Rick reflects on his journey he hopes future dance students are able to make dance a long term career. However, he has an understanding as to why so many dancers quit in their 20s to help their economic situation (Montgomery & Robinson, 2002).

Jennie Makihara was a theater major with a focus on dance at Amherst College (Montgomery & Robinson, 2002). Jennie moved to New York to be an actress but found herself waiting tables to support herself. Jennie went back to school and enrolled at Temple University where she completed an MFA in dance. Jennie worked with a dance company and took several teaching jobs to support herself. However, she realized that dance was not being funded and found it difficult to receive financial support. Seeking a change, Jennie decided to try massage therapy. Massage therapy was not exactly what Jennie was looking for, so she transitioned again to a career in acupuncture (Montgomery & Robinson, 2002). She enjoys her work and is able to make a good living. She still continues to dance but only as a form of exercise.

The previous personal accounts from dance students were given in the 1970s and again in the early 2000s. In the spirit of keeping the research contemporary, an additional student experience will be shared to give insight into one of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's most prominent dancers. A very successful dancer named Misty Copeland recently authored a biography to share her journey and dance experiences. Misty is a very popular dancer who has appeared in television commercials, traveled the world, and has even performed with music artists such as Prince. Misty is currently enjoying a very successful career as a dancer and is credited as being the first black woman to star in Igor Stravinsky's iconic role, the Firebird. Like many other dance

students, after high school Misty went to a private dance school as opposed to a traditional dance program at a college or university. Misty moved from San Pedro, California to attend the very prestigious American Ballet Theatre in New York to further her career opportunities (Copeland & Jones, 2014). Misty's dance regimen at the American Ballet Theatre was strenuous. Every morning she would warm up with a 90-minute ballet class and then rehearse from noon till 7 p.m. (Copeland & Jones, 2014). This intensive type of training is mandatory for many elite classical ballet companies. After many positive reviews by bloggers and audience ovations, Misty's career was taken to new heights.

All of the experiences of these dance students have led them to their current careers. Some of them are working as performers and others as dance teachers. Laurie as a dance therapist will not perform or teach at all. But the commonality of all these examples is that dancing has remained prominent in their lives. Not all dancers will follow the same career path. What is common is that most dance performers go through stages from student, dancer, and then teacher (Cornell & Hansen, 1976).

#### Academic Value

Employability is a concern for graduating dance students. The job market is very competitive, and employment prospects are, for the most part, uncertain. Similar to actors and musicians, dancers often work for several employers on short term, temporary, or a non-exclusive basis (Brown, 2007). Dance work rarely comes in the form of annual contracts. Most contracts range from a few weeks to several months. Of all the career fields in performing arts, dance is the smallest, behind acting, and music (Cornell & Hansen, 1976). Dancers can work as

performers on musical shows, television, and film. They can also be employed as teachers, dance historians, or manage their own dance companies. Academics are likely to disapprove the idea of employability being a curriculum goal (Brown, 2007). However, for the parents of dance students, the uncertainty of job prospects can detour them from supporting dance as a major. Parental concerns can include the value of degree in relation to making a viable living and ability of their children to support a future family (Lo, 2006).

Employability may translate to value to other people; however, the student may only be concerned with learning the body of knowledge of dance. A study of dance students in the United Kingdom revealed that many performance and technical dance skills were developed from experiences in the college as well as outside schools in the community. However, the historical knowledge of dance was attributed to coming from the formal higher education setting (Huxley, 2012). This is something that differentiates the dance curriculum in higher education and attracts students. But do dance students feel this curriculum is adequately preparing them for a career in dance?

In other fields, having years of experience can mean more pay. This is not necessarily the case when it comes to careers in dance. When dancers are employed, it is usually part time with no benefits including health care, sick leave, or retirement (Risner, 2007). Most dancers will hold secondary jobs to make up for uncertainty of a dance career. A study in Australia showed that dance graduates who worked only in dance had 67% lower earnings than dance graduates who included other forms of work (Bennett, 2009). With numbers like this, it is easy to see why parents or critics can be skeptical of dance education. Concerns about having a career in dance range from unpredictability, cost, and challenges (Pickard & Bailey, 2009). Also

hurting dance students and instructors in higher education is the fact that anyone without a degree in dance can become a dance instructor in the private sector.

Defining professionalism in dance can be ambiguous. It can be imposed from the outside by degree completion, job status, and salary (Koff & Mistry, 2012). Dancers can achieve professional status as both dancers and dance educators. The problem with dance education is that there are many ways to become an instructor or have a career without having any certification. Developing a consistency across the profession as to what a professional is can help add value to the dance degree. Being a dance instructor should mean having a professional identity. The instructor should have experience, education, technical knowledge, and skills. Dance instructors should also be involved or affiliated with their professional communities and be able to produce credentials (Koff & Mistry, 2012). To teach in arts education usually consists of a formal internship where the student also teaches and develops to become an educator (Koff & Mistry, 2012). The internship process is usually conducted in the private sector. The process is not very structured and does not mean the instructor is an expert in the field.

The term expert is appropriate for individuals who have spent a significant part of their life training and showing a consistent level of high performance (You, 2009). Talent and ability alone are not enough to classify an individual as an expert. Personal commitment of time, effort and resilience are part of developing expertise (Pickard & Bailey, 2009). Expertise is for people who have a long period of experience, who have developed their ability and have demonstrated a mastery of high performance (You, 2009). Increasing evidence in dance research shows that substantial amounts of quality practice over a number of years are necessary conditions for later performance success (Pickard & Bailey, 2009). As with dance education, little research has been

conducted on outstanding and effective dance specialist/teachers (You, 2009). Students can benefit from learning from experts because they are more student-centered, whereas novice teachers are more subject centered. Higher education dance teachers have to compete with dance teachers in the private sector. Dance educators emphasize more than the technical aspects of dance. They also focus on teaching students to understand the basic notions and meaning of dance (You, 2009). These standards of practice are what differentiate higher education dance instructors from dance instructors in the private sector. There is evidence that shows that dance standards in the K-12 environment are rarely realized. There is much more success in affecting dance standards in the higher education environment (Hagood, 2007). At the national level, more effort and participation needs to occur to help voice concerns and work on policy initiatives. Since departing from the classification of physical education, the National Dance Education Organization has become an appropriate organization for dance educators seeking professional development (Hagood, 2007).

### Protean Career

Length of career, earnings, lack of standardized instructors, and career advancement are all limited in dance and are areas of concern (Risner, 2007). Careers in dance are typically short and can end by the time a dancer reaches 40 years of age (Jeffri & Throsby, 2006). Dance artists must prepare for the likelihood that a significant amount of their working lives may be spent in non-performance related jobs (Bennett, 2009). Reaching the level of a professional dancer takes arduous training for many years. It can take up to a decade for some individuals to gain some

proficiency (Chua, 2014). Professional dancers often spend their careers in continuous transition between different jobs.

The term that is best suited to describe careers in the arts is protean. The term is derived from the mythological Greek sea god, Proteus, who was able to change form in order to avoid danger (Bennett, 2009). This form of changing is also something people do to remain employable. Of the many career development theories, social cognitive career theory (SCCT) is probably the most relevant to the work of protean careerists. Because dance is a protean career, students have to consider social and economic factors such as goals, compensation, and expected outcomes when it comes to career choice. The decision to pursue a career in the arts is almost always tied to previous success in an artistic activity, and success for protean careerists means to achieve personal and professional goals (Bennett, 2009). For others, success can be correlated to prestige, status, and performance activity. Students enrolled as dance majors may see success as the attainment of a performance career (Bennett, 2009).

Protean careers are less traditional than the corporate career model. A term that is also used with careers in the arts is boundaryless. Boundaryless refers to work undertaken independently of traditional career arrangements, hierarchies, and career progression (Bennett, 2009). People with a boundaryless career attitude are thought of as being mobile and less committed. However, the term that best describes a career in the arts is protean. In a protean career, individuals are in charge of their own careers and are more self-directed. The self-directed orientation suggests independence from external career influences (Briscoe & Finkelstein, 2009). The degree of mobility is high, and success is defined by the individual as opposed to the traditional organizational career where the organization is in charge of the

individual and the degree of mobility is lower. Also, the criteria for judging success in a traditional career involves position level or salary (Bennett, 2009). There are two predominant attitudes that are displayed when a person is said to have a protean career orientation. The first is the values-driven attitude which suggests that the individual's internal values provide the guidance and measurement of success for the individual's career (Segers, Inceoglu, Vloeberghs, Bartram, & Henderickx, 2008). Self-directedness is another attitude that implies individuals are in charge of their own career management and learning demands. People with a protean career orientation are learning on a continuous basis. Dancing is a perfect example of a protean career, as dancers are always learning the latest dance styles, standards, and requirements to help them be prepared for employment opportunities. Being motivated by achievement and personal growth is likely to put people in a position that makes it effortless to seek and adapt to new tasks or roles (Segers et al., 2008).

### Summary

The results of this study were intended to provide additional insight into the experiences of dance students in higher education. The respondents' answers in the interview setting served to give educators a better understanding of what their dance students are going through. Light can be shed as to motivations and perceptions of dance students. The research also focused on students' plans after graduation. Results enabled the researcher to show, to some extent, how these dance students measured their own success.



## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

Chapter 3 describes the methods and procedures that guided the research study. The research questions that were used were framed around the building blocks of social cognitive career theory (SCCT) such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. The purpose of the study was to look critically at the experiences of dance students in higher education and gain insight into their decision making processes. The results should give understanding to motivations on persistence and plans after graduation. This chapter also introduces the research design, research questions, site description, and explains how the participants were selected for the research. The chapter concludes with details on the data collection process, interview protocol, and the methods used to analyze the collected data.

### Research Design

A qualitative interview was employed in this research. Qualitative interviewing is a tool that captures the voices and ways people make meaning of their experience (Rabionet, 2011). Qualitative research studies and interprets phenomena with respect to the meanings people bring to them (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). In addition, qualitative research is useful for collecting insights into regular and problematic experiences (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The interviews were used as a tool to interpret student experiences and learn what motivated the interviewees to become dance majors and what challenges they encountered in the process. Another reason the interview method was selected is because it allows for the researcher to

discuss specific areas and topics. Qualitative research can also assist in answering questions such as who, where, how many, how much, and define the relationship to specific variables (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). This was a phenomenological study because it described the meaning of a lived experience from several individuals as opposed to the life of a single individual (Creswell, 2007). The researcher sought to identify what was universally experienced by all the participants. The data collected provided a description of how individuals experience the phenomenon of being dance students in higher education. It was also used to develop a composite description of the essence of the experience which according to Creswell (2007) can be built based on the student's experience with conditions, situations, or context.

The concept was to interview current dance students and ask them set questions in hopes it would shed light on the barriers and pressures they experienced. The barriers and stressors were then examined as to how they affected the students' personal goals and expected outcomes. The data were gathered in the community college setting. It was anticipated that after questioning subjects it would be easier to determine the relationship of dance students to the factors that affect their ability to complete the program.

### Phenomenological Research

Edmund Husserl formulated scientific methods that could be used to assist in the investigation of human experience and behavior. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Husserl developed a qualitative research method called phenomenology (Wertz, 2005). Phenomenological research is one of many qualitative models that guide human science research. This type of study of human experiences is not approachable through quantitative approaches (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology captures and reflects human behavior and the first person experience (Wertz, 2005). By using this method of research, I was able to obtain descriptions of the participants' feelings about their dance education experience. The goal was to determine what the experience meant to the participants so the information gathered could be used to provide a comprehensive description. From each participant's description, general or universal meanings are derived (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl emphasized that scientific knowledge begins with an unbiased description of its subject matter (Wertz, 2005). This means suspending scientific assumptions. Phenomenological research focuses on the wholeness of the experience and searches for meaning (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological perspective values inner perceptions. Perception is actually regarded as the primary source of knowledge in phenomenology. Certain types of knowledge can be acquired by becoming one with the subject (Moustakas, 1994).

### Research Questions

This research was conducted to describe the process by which students became and were dance majors in college. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What leads college students to a pre-major in dance?
2. How do dance majors in college make sense of their college journey?

### Geographic Location and Setting

The site selected for this research study was a college in a metropolitan city in the southeastern part of the United States. The college is close to a large university and several other

colleges. Though it has several campuses, the dance program is primarily operated on one campus which serves over 15,000 students annually. In recent years, the college has been recognized for excellence as one of the best in the nation. It offers an associate in arts degree pre-major in dance performance. The degree is only available to students who audition for the program. The auditions consist of a technique class on ballet, modern, and jazz combinations.

### Participant Selection

The dance program fluctuates in enrollment every semester. At the time of this study, the dance program consisted of 28 dance majors. Of the 28 dance majors, two were males and 26 were females. In total, data were collected from six students from the targeted population of dance majors. Participants in the study did not include students who were just taking dance classes as electives as part of a non-dance major. Students with the most credits were chosen first. Thus, I targeted sophomore dance majors who were close to graduation. My intention was to focus on the student population that had the most dance program experience.

Purposive sampling was used to locate the participants for this study. With assistance from the chair of the dance department, participants were selected based on this credit criteria. This method of selection was used because it allowed me to select participants based on their experience with the phenomena. Participation in this study was not mandatory but was solely on a volunteer basis. Each participant was 18 years or older. The students were provided a letter that included a brief description of the study and what they could expect by participating. The participants will be contacted by an introductory e-mail (Appendix A) to explain the purpose of

the study and ask for their participation in the study. Once the participant has agreed to take part in the study an additional e-mail was sent to schedule the one on one interview.

### Data Collection

All interviews were conducted in a face to face format. The six individual interviews were scheduled at a mutually convenient time and location or at the library because it is a quiet setting on the college campus. Participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded and that I would be taking extensive notes. Field notes assisted me in documenting research activities. The field notes can describe interactions, reflections, reactions, and conversations (Thompson, 2014).

### Instrumentation

An interview protocol (Appendix B) was used as the main form of instrumentation for my interview with current dance students in higher education. The first part of the interview consisted of demographic questions about the participant. The second part of the interview was comprised of open-ended questions that allowed participants to discuss their personal experiences and feelings with the phenomenon. The questions were grouped based upon seven tenets of SCCT: barriers/challenges, family/peer, career interests, vicarious learning, self-efficacy, satisfaction, and outcome expectations. The interviews were conducted as a method to gather useful information to answer the research questions. One-on-one interviewing was the type of interview that was employed for this research. The interviews were audio recorded to ensure accuracy of the interview. Audio recording the interviews allowed the researcher to take

notes based on the responses given. Interviews were conducted over a period of four weeks.

The interview consisted of approximately 20 questions. A summary of the relationship between the research questions and the theoretical framework is reflected in Table 3.

Table 3

*Relationship between Research Questions and Theoretical Framework*

Research Questions	Theoretical Framework
1. What leads college students to a pre-major in dance?	Interview items 7,8,9,20
2. How do dance majors in college make sense of their college journey?	Interview items 1,2,3,4,5,6,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,19

Data Analysis

With the interviewees' consent, the interviews were recorded and later transcribed. My data analysis began with my transcription of the interviews. After the transcription was complete, a comparison between the transcription and the recording was performed to check for accuracy. Responses were then sorted to determine which themes were prevalent.

Trustworthiness

The first consideration in designing and administering an inquiry is the study's trustworthiness (Rallis, Rossman, & Gajda, 2007). The standards by which trustworthiness is judged are not only based on procedural matters but also moral principles and ethical standards. Procedural rules need to be trusted along with balancing veracity and subjectivity. In addition,

ethical considerations for the participants contribute to the trustworthiness of a study (Rallis et al., 2007). Trustworthiness in qualitative research is often questioned because the concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way in naturalistic work (Shenton, 2004). Constructs have been created to address qualitative issues of trustworthiness. These four constructs are (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. Credibility, in preference to internal validity, deals with how identical the findings are to reality (Shenton, 2004). Transferability, in preference to external validity, is concerned with the extent to which the results or findings can be applied to a wider population. Dependability is similar to reliability in that if the same methods were applied in the same context to the same participants, similar results would be achieved (Shenton, 2004). Confirmability, in preference to objectivity, ensures that the findings are a result of the informants' responses as opposed to being influenced by the researcher (Shenton, 2004). To gain trust of the participants, the researcher maintained a professional demeanor and practiced active listening. Another way the researcher gained trust was by answering all the questions asked by the participants.

In order to attain a more accurate estimate of qualitative results, data were collected through different methods in a process called triangulation. Triangulation is a process of qualitative cross-validation (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006). Qualitative research seeks to understand meaning of an individual's interaction with the world. The most common forms of data collection for qualitative research are field notes, surveys, and interviews (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006). In the present study, triangulation was achieved by comparing transcripts to field notes.

### Risks/Benefits

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts involved in taking part in this study. No benefits were promised in return for interviewees' participation. The results of this study may better inform college professionals about the current status of dance students, possibly regarding issues of retention, persistence, and graduation.

### Ethical Considerations

It is an ethical requirement for the researcher to protect the confidentiality of the participants of the study. The participants of the study disclosed personal information during the interviews so it was imperative that the researcher remove any identifying information from any documentation. Steps were taken using de-identification to remove personal identifiers of the participants. The researcher assured the participants of the study that their conversations would remain confidential. Privacy is important, and for that reason safeguards were in place to ensure anonymity. Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants for their protection. The data from the interviews were stored on the researcher's personal computer under password protection.

### Institutional Review Board

With their informed consent, the participants/students were the primary units of analysis. Clearance was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). To achieve informed consent the participants in the study were given the university's Institutional Review Board Consent Statement (Appendix C). To ensure the study was carried out in an ethical manner, IRB approval was sought before the initiation of the interviews. The procedure of data collection



followed and met the requirements of the IRB. Following the defense of the proposal, the proposal was submitted and received IRB approval to conduct the study (Appendix D).

### Originality Report

Once the dissertation was completed it was submitted to ithenticate.com as required by the University of Central Florida to ensure the originality of the work. Ithenticate.com is an online program that is designed to ensure content originality. Ithenticate detects plagiarism by comparing manuscripts from its database. The date of my defense, the chair discussed the results to my committee.

### Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and examine the experiences of college dance students attending a two-year college. In this chapter, I presented the research questions, site description, sampling method, data collection and analysis procedures and explained issues related to trustworthiness, risks/benefits, ethical considerations and confidentiality.

## CHAPTER 4 PARTICIPANTS: WHO ARE THESE DANCERS?

### Introduction

In this chapter I will detail the lives of the participants in my study. The six participants are college students who are dance majors at a community college. Their stories provide insight as to their process of thinking and lived experiences as dance students in college. My goal was (a) to have students discuss their journeys by answering questions and (b) to give them a platform to share their personal experiences. In this chapter, I will profile all participants and discuss their responses to the questions I posed using the interview protocol.

### Conducting the Interview

The Interview Protocol (Appendix B) served as my guide for the interviews. Through my work as a college advisor, I talk to students on a daily basis. I felt this would prepare me well when it came to interviewing a student population. Another connection I felt I had with the participants was that I am also a dancer. Armed with these two advantages, I felt that the participants would open up to me very easily. However, I have never actually conducted interviews before for research. So my actual skills and confidence took time to grow and develop.

A total of six face to face interviews were conducted for my research. The questions were open-ended, and that allowed the participants an opportunity to give details and expand their answers. Initially I scheduled the interviews to take place for 60 minutes. However, the longest interview was completed in approximately 45 minutes. The average duration of the

remaining interviews was approximately 35 minutes. The participants varied in how comfortable and talkative they were during the interviews. Some participants gave long answers and went slightly off topic, but other participants gave short quick answers. I made it a point to inform the participants of the importance of their contribution to my research.

To recruit my participants I sent my recruitment letter (Appendix A) to the main professor of the dance department so she could forward it to be displayed in their dance department email blast. Once a week the students in the dance department receive an email with updates; and for that month, my letter was also contained in the email. In addition, the dance professor also informed her students about my study and that I was in need of volunteers for my research. Within the first two weeks of the email blast I received three emailed responses to my letter. I responded quickly to their emails to set up a mutually convenient time and place to conduct the interview. However, I quickly learned that scheduling a time would prove to be difficult because of the dance students' intense summer schedule. The students were preparing for their big summer recital and were in class from almost all day from 8 am to 5 pm Monday through Thursday. The only big break the students had that would be long enough for an interview was around 2pm. If I tried conducting the interviews after 5 pm, I risked the students being exhausted from a long day of work which might have impacted the quality of their responses.

Finally after confirming times for my first three sessions, I was ready for my first interview. However, when I went to the location for the first interview the student was not there and never showed up for the interview. I received no messages via phone or email as to her cancelling the interview session. In the following weeks I conducted the other two interviews

and even rescheduled the first interview that previously cancelled. Although, I must admit it was slightly frustrating going back and forth via email with the participants due to the amount of time in between their responses to my messages. I would have much rather preferred texting back and forth with the participants, but it appeared they were more comfortable using email to communicate. At this point after my first three interviews were conducted, my leads went cold. I asked the students to tell their classmates about my study, but I still did not receive any further volunteers. At that time I decided to wait until the summer dance recital was over to try and recruit the remaining volunteers. The week following the summer dance recital I contacted the dance professor via email to inform her that I needed to gather a few more participants to complete my study, and I asked for her help in recruiting them. This tactic proved extremely helpful as the dance professor approached me personally to tell me she had three more participants waiting in her office who were ready to be interviewed.

The settings for my interviews varied between two locations. I originally planned on conducting my meetings outside in a covered patio area on the college campus. The area has three tables and three chairs at each table. Even though it was the summer and the temperature was hot, the whole patio was covered and in the shade. This location was the setting for my interviews with Lizzy and Ellen. I decided on this location because of its close proximity to the dance studio on campus, and I also anticipated a minimal amount of pedestrian traffic in that area. My third interview was with Wanda, and she suggested meeting at an indoor lobby area next to the dance classroom. Although this area had slightly more foot traffic from students and employees, I agreed because I felt we could position ourselves away from entrance door of the lobby. This would allow us not to be distracted or interrupted by people as they entered and

exited the lobby. This setting had several lounge type seats with very small end tables next to them. This setting was also used for my final three interviews with Bethany, Michael, and Jason.

In my email exchanges with the first three participants, I sent them an attachment with my demographic questions. My intention was to complete this part of my research prior to the actual interview so we could have more time to focus on the open ended questions. At the beginning of each interview, I informed the participants that the interviews would be recorded and that they would be given pseudonyms to protect their identity. I also began the interview with an icebreaker question in an effort to build rapport. This was a tactic recommended to me by one of my committee members. It was my hope that the icebreaker question would ease any nerves and make the participants more comfortable with the interview.

As I conducted the six interviews I wrote field notes of the experience. The field notes were taken to assist me in documenting the variables of the interview that were not audible such as location, physical descriptions, and nerves. The field notes were taken immediately after the observations were made and again after the interview during a time of self-reflection. To achieve triangulation, I used the field notes, and interview transcriptions to compare and check for accuracy.

#### Demographic Information: Making Sense of the Dance Company

To qualify for the study the participants had to be degree seeking dance students at the college and not just taking dance classes for personal enrichment. An additional criterion for the participants was that they had to be seeking an Associates in Arts degree in dance. The participants included two men and four women, ranging in age from 19 to 28 years old. The

years of dance training ranged from two to 17. In addition, five of the six participants were sophomore students and one was a freshman. Only one was a first generation college student. Five of the six participants indicated that they were not married (one did not answer the question), and none of the six indicated that they had any children. All but one were currently employed. A summary of the demographic information for the interviewees is provided in Table 4.

Table 4

*Participant Demographic Information*

<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Class Standing</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Years of Dance Training</b>	<b>First Generation College Student</b>	<b>Currently Employed</b>	<b>Married</b>
<b>Ellen</b>	20	Sophomore	No	17	No	No	No
<b>Lizzy</b>	19	Sophomore	No	10	No	Yes	No
<b>Wanda</b>	20	Sophomore	No	13	No	Yes	No
<b>Bethany</b>	19	Freshman	No	10	Yes	Yes	N/A
<b>Michael</b>	22	Sophomore	No	2	No	Yes	No
<b>Jason</b>	28	Sophomore	No	4	No	Yes	No

Ellen

The first interview I conducted was with Ellen. She was the second student to contact me regarding my study. She reached me via e-mail and seemed very eager to assist me with my research. It was a Tuesday afternoon on a warm summer day. I remember approaching the outside patio area on campus where we agreed to meet. I arrived five minutes early, and she was already sitting at the table waiting for me. Because this was my first interview, it served as a trial run for me in determining if I would continue to use this location for future interviews. I

decided on the outside patio area because it was close to the dance classroom on campus, and the location did not receive much pedestrian traffic. I was also concerned that it would become too uncomfortable being outside on a hot summer day. However, the patio was covered and that provided us ample shade. Along with my testing out the location, this interview served as a practice interview for me as the researcher. Prior to the interview, I finalized an outline of how I wanted to conduct the interview. My goal was to stick to the outline and make smooth transitions to reduce the awkward pauses.

Looking at Ellen, I noticed she was wearing athletic attire and was sporting a support on her lower leg. I assumed immediately the injury was dance related. Later on in the interview she mentioned she was dealing with arthritis and tendonitis. When conversing with Ellen, I decided to start off discussing the purpose of my research and the value of her contribution. I then asked my first question which was not recorded in hopes that it could be an icebreaker. The icebreaker question worked perfectly because I felt it allowed her to speak about a positive moment in her life. After that I continued with the questions in my interview protocol with the recorder on.

I thought Ellen was very honest about the difficulties and discipline required to be a dancer. Ellen stated that physically dance:

was strenuous because you are putting your body in abnormal positions (Ellen, p. 1, line 2).

In addition, to the physicality of dance Ellen casually brought up the struggles dancers have with their diet, saying:

I may want a candy bar right now but I know I should not have a candy bar. I should go home and eat something healthy, some protein (Ellen, p. 1, lines 4-6).

This was a very candid response and I was glad that Ellen shared that thought with me. Finally, Ellen also discussed the challenges regarding the cost of dance education. She is fortunate to have a pre-paid plan to cover the cost of tuition. That way her only out-of-pocket expenses would be dance shoes and costumes.

Ellen started dancing at a very early age. She has been dancing since she was three years old and overall had 17 years of dance training. When I asked her why she decided on dance as a major, she stated that:

Dance has been the one consistent thing in my life (Ellen, p. 1, line 16).

She talked about how much she loved dance and how that made the decision easy for her. Ellen also has two sisters who were dancers, so she grew up around dancing. Ellen also received support from her mother who wanted to dance as a child but never had the opportunity to do so. The only resistance she faced when deciding on her college major came from her father. He expressed that he would have preferred her to go into science, engineering, or business programs. Ellen expressed feelings of motivation based on her ability to complete tasks:

You get a very excited feeling. Your heart starts beating fast and you say I can do it, I can do it. And you push yourself further (Ellen, p. 3, lines 93-95).

In contrast, I did ask her if having troubles completing tasks ever discouraged her from being a dance major. She replied that every dancer has those moments. As a dancer for many years she knows that it is a temporary feeling that one just needs to brush off and keep going.

As the interview progressed, I stopped taking notes to keep maintaining eye contact and show that I was an active listener. I felt that the times I would put my head down to write an observation her answers were short. That was something I knew I would have to consider in my



future interviews. In discussing her future goals and aspirations, she stated that she would like to remain in the dance field but not as an active dancer but as a dance therapist. She said:

I am looking more into well, sort of, I am looking into dance therapy (Ellen, p. 2, line 44).

In talking with Ellen I felt that she had a clear understanding of the challenges that a career in dance would entail. She knows the job market is competitive for a dancer and that even being a dance therapist could be challenging because of how new the occupation is.

### Lizzy

Lizzy was the third student to respond to my recruitment letter via e-mail. However, she was my second interview. Lizzy was a 19-year-old sophomore dance major at the college. Like the previous participant Ellen, we met at the covered patio area outside near the dance classroom. It was another hot summer afternoon, but we were fortunate that we were able to interview before it rained. I arrived about five minutes early, and Lizzy arrived on time. She arrived wearing athletic clothing and was holding a water bottle with a superhero design on it. Even though I had one interview under my belt, I still was not proficient at probing the participants to receive the answers to my questions. This is important because with Lizzy I thought her answers were short and that she seemed slightly uncomfortable with the interview. I remember briefing her on my research and accidentally recording my icebreaker question. I excluded her answer to the icebreaker question to keep it consistent with responses of the other participants.

Lizzy mentioned how expensive the cost of pursuing a dance education over the years has been. She is now receiving financial aid in the form of government loans to pay for her tuition.

One interesting fact I learned from Lizzy was that she had a deal in place with her grandfather that if she maintained a B average, he would pay the loan for her. Lizzy also is employed at a dance studio when she is not at school. She discussed the physical demands of her being enrolled in the summer semester. The students are in class Monday through Thursday from 7 am to 5 pm. The students have some small intermissions during the day, and that is the time slot I used to conduct my interviews.

In Lizzy's household, college was not forced on her and her siblings by her parents. However, when she announced she was pursuing a degree in dance, she faced resistance from her father and grandfather. She told me her father said:

You are not going to go anywhere (Lizzy, p. 1, line 22).

In addition to that comment, her father also threatened that she would not be allowed to live with him at home. Despite all resistance, Lizzy still followed her passion and continued to major in dance education.

During our discussion, Lizzy mentioned several times that dancing was doing what she loved. She said she could not see herself going to college without receiving some type of degree in dance. She also indicated that she had received strong encouragement from her grandmother who said:

You can do it, you are good enough, you can do it (Lizzy, p. 1, line 8).

Those words resonated with her and pushed her more towards pursuing dance. She also mentioned to me that her friends were very supportive of her decision as well.

Lizzy is considering being a double major when she transfers with her Associate in Arts degree. She seemed conflicted, because she can see herself dancing in a bachelor's program but

she may want to pursue science as well, thinking she would want be interested in physical therapy. She can also envision herself being a studio owner, dance teacher, or choreographer. Lizzy moved from Iowa to enroll in this Florida dance program, and she noted that she would not mind relocating again for her career. As we discussed career possibilities, she was very aware of how competitive the job market is for a dancer. Again, she was firm in stating that it would all be worth it because she would be doing what she loved. Towards the end of my interview, I noticed that Lizzy had very short responses. I took the liberty to try some follow up questions to give her an opportunity to share her experiences. However, most of her responses to the follow-up questions were quick as well.

#### Wanda

Wanda was originally the first person to respond to my recruitment letter via the e-mail from the dance department. After corresponding with her by e-mail, we decided to meet at the outside patio area by the dance classroom. However, when I arrived at the table she was nowhere to be found. At first I thought she was running late but after about 20 minutes I realized she was not coming. I double checked my e-mail inbox to see if she had left me a message regarding the cancelation but I did not find one. I decided to send her another e-mail after wrapping up my first two interviews, and I left my phone number in the e-mail and encouraged her to text me. Soon after I received a text from her where she apologized for missing the first interview and wanted to reschedule. We were set to meet outside in the patio, but when I arrived there I received a text from her asking if we could meet in the lobby in front of the dance classroom. The benefit to being inside was the air conditioning and the padded seats. On the

other hand, this lobby was in close proximity to an entrance door. My fear was that there would be many students or employees walking in and out of that door causing a distraction. I decided to strategically sit at an angle that would require her to have her back to the door in order to speak to me.

Wanda was a Hispanic sophomore student and had 13 years of dance training. She was dressed casually and had on bright red lipstick. I believe this was due to the fact that the summer recital was already over, and she may not have had practice that day. At the table was her small water jug and a bag with wheels to carry her items. Wanda seemed very upbeat and talkative. Overall, I felt that Wanda gave me longer, and more thoughtful answers to my questions in comparison to the other participants. She had her arm bent, resting on the chair with her fingers touching her face as we spoke. Occasionally she would look up when she was recalling her experiences, almost as if she was picturing the stories she was describing.

When talking to Wanda about some of the challenges she faced, she mentioned having to budget because of her expenses. Buying shoes, leotards, and taking classes all adds up. She mentioned the challenges of figuring out how much she could contribute and how much her parents could contribute to her dance education. She came to this dance program because the previous college she attended was beyond her budget range. Her financial aid was not enough to cover her expenses at the previous institution. However, her financial aid covered all of her tuition in her present program.

Wanda was not always 100% sure that she wanted to major in dance. She eliminated possible majors based on what she liked and what she felt did not match her strengths. After considering some options, she realized that dance was something that she enjoyed and that she

was actually good at. After completing her first semester of classes, she was even more convinced that she had made the right decision. Wanda informed me that her mother was supportive of her decision, but her father was more concerned. She said her father would say:

Make sure you are actually going to get paid (Wanda, p. 2, line 34).

Part of her father's concern was that Wanda's sister also majored in dance and was unsuccessful in finding employment as a dancer. Wanda's sister had served as a good resource for her in her dance journey since she already went through the process. She informed me her sister filled her in on the challenges that lay ahead of her. Wanda describe her sister's advice as:

Most of the time she just explained how it was hard for her (Wanda, p. 2, line 51).

Wanda definitely knows she wants to transfer and pursue a bachelor's degree in dance, but has not decided on an institution. She also expressed interest in becoming a college dance teacher which would mean acquiring a master's degree in dance as well. For the most part, she has narrowed her career goals to working for a dance company or becoming a college professor in dance. Wanda also mentioned being open to dance jobs in Puerto Rico after she graduates with a bachelor's degree in dance.

When I asked her about the job market for an aspiring dancer, Wanda said she knew that it can be difficult to find a job. To elaborate she replied:

Like my teacher says, there is always something better, someone smarter, someone younger behind you. Waiting to get your job (Wanda, p. 6, line 198).

She realizes that even if she gets hired for a dance job, it may not pay very well, and that will make things hard financially. Wanda says she has an open mind to having a second job that is

not dance related because it will probably be needed. However, as long as she is dancing, she will be happy. She went on to say:

Wherever I am, if I am dancing, I am happy. That is honestly all I can do, that's all I want to do (Wanda, p. 7, line 204).

### Bethany

Bethany is a 19-year-old Caucasian freshman with 10 years dance training experience. Bethany did not respond to my recruitment e-mail. She was actually referred to me by the head dance professor in the department. After waiting several weeks to find more participants for my study, I decided to send an e-mail to the dance professor asking for assistance in recruitment. I inquired if she could ask some students personally if they would like to participate in my study. She soon informed me that she had three volunteers who wanted to participate as long as I was going to be available to conduct the interviews that same day. Immediately I dropped everything I was doing to meet them at her office. Bethany was the first of three students I would interview that day. I took her to the inside lobby area in front of the dance department where I had conducted my interview with Wanda. I remember feeling that I needed to rush my interview, as there were two more students waiting for their interviews.

As Bethany had a seat, I noticed she was wearing all black athletic gear. She also seemed to be in a rush. I gave her the demographic questions before proceeding with the interview, and I noticed she skipped a question. I do not believe she intended to omit the question. I think that perhaps she was in a hurry and just missed the question. Bethany discussed how paying for a dance education could be financially tough, but at the same time it is manageable. She mentioned that sometimes the teachers provide the students food during the day and how that

helps the students with their expenses. Bethany stated that she is very fortunate because her parents are paying for her dance education. They know it is something that she loves doing and both were very supportive of her decision to major in dance. She told me her parents did not go to college and were happy that she was. Bethany's parents have watched her perform and dance at an early age and have always encouraged her to keep dancing. I experienced a déjà vu moment when I asked her what people and friends thought of her choice to major in dance, because her response was similar to Wanda's response. Bethany replied:

They are surprised. They are like what can you do with that major as a degree? And I'm like you can actually do a lot (Bethany, p. 2, line 34).

During the interview Bethany mentioned possibly wanting to double major in dance and photography for her bachelor's degree. She also enjoys photography and thinks she can combine the two by taking pictures of dancers. Bethany realizes that her window to dance professionally is short. She knows that after she graduates that if she is ever going to dance that would be the time. Her goal would be to dance for a company and travel the world. When speaking of her goals, Bethany said:

Long term is to keep dancing as long as I can. It's not very, . you can dance till a certain age. Short term, I guess to finish school and see how far I can go (Bethany, p. 2, line 51).

She is also considering coming back to school after dancing to go for a degree in business in case she wanted to open her own dance studio.

I felt the need to ask follow-up questions during our interview, but I just never did. Maybe, it was because I had two more interviews lined up right after Bethany's interview I felt pressure to just stick to my main questions. When discussing overcoming challenges, Bethany

recalled struggling with ballet. She remembered getting yelled at all the time by the instructor and admitted to herself that ballet was the hardest style of dance for her. However, she recalled how happy she was when the instructor complimented her on her progress after working hard and correcting her techniques. That was one of the moments she realized that things can happen if one works hard. Later on I asked Bethany if she ever considered changing her major, and she replied that she had not. She later elaborated:

Dance is my everything. So if I can have a job that I love to do. I have done pretty much my whole life, that is my dream come true (Bethany, p. 4, line 101).

#### Michael

After my interview with Bethany, she went to the office where the other two participants were waiting and sent the next student out. Michael was the next student for my study. Michael was a 22-year-old black sophomore student in the dance program. I noticed Michael was wearing a hat and athletic clothing as he approached me and took his seat. When Michael submitted his answers to the demographic questions, the first thing I noticed was how little experience he had dancing. Michael started dancing at age 19. Unlike my previous participants, Michael originally was a general studies major who just took dance classes for fun. Michael explained he liked dance but would not major in it because he was afraid of the audition process. After taking a dance class as an elective, he gained confidence and reconsidered making dance his major. I found Michael to be soft spoken but at the same time very talkative.

When I asked Michael about his struggles and challenges, he mentioned something I had yet to hear from the other participants. He said time management was a problem for him due to the fact that he did not have reliable transportation. He told me that in dance the expectation is to



arrive early. However, he was dependent on the bus so he had to be careful not to be late for class or for work. It was important for Michael to maintain his job as his financial aid did not cover the whole cost of his education.

Michael said his parents were supportive of his choice of a major. However, he said his mother really had him pegged as a theatre major, since he had some acting experience. She really did not see his decision coming, so she was surprised. After she heard that Michael wanted to dance, she tried to convince him that acting had dance in it. Michael recalled the conversation with his mother:

What are you going to do with dance? Why don't you continue with acting? Acting has dance in it (Michael, p. 2, line 50).

So the only challenge Michael had was convincing his mother that he would not be wasting his time. During the interview, Michael said that sometimes friends ask him what he is going to do with a dance degree. He responds to his friends by explaining all of the career options that come with being a graduate of a dance program. He defines being successful by being happy. Michael stated:

As long as you can make a living, you can feed yourself and have a roof over your head and be happy and that can be considered successful as far as yourself goes (Michael, p. 2, lines 64-66).

Michael is very clear on his goals. He wants to continue to improve his dancing and training in hopes of being employed by a dance company. He would like to transfer after graduating and continue working on a bachelor's degree in dance. Michael anticipates having to be flexible in terms of location for a job. He hopes to make connections and be hired with the assistance of the network he has formed. Michael mentioned dance being a calling and that his

future opportunities are not things he will necessarily seek but those that will come his way. I got the impression from my conversation with Michael that he believed if he worked hard enough, opportunities would present themselves. That is the reason he did not indicate a specific job location or company where he wished to work. He believes that if he works hard and keeps forming connections, he should have job opportunities. Michael believes that by the time he has completed his schooling, he will have built a good support system if he needs advice about job prospects. In the meantime, he is working a side job to continue to save.

Michael frequently mentioned improving his skills and what those skills meant to him. As a person, having difficulties with dance steps and then being able to execute the moves properly excites him. Slowly getting better reinforces his drive and motivation. When discussing his satisfaction with his current dance program, Michael talked about how the program prepared him to be tougher mentally:

Dance does require a lot of your mentality, mental strength you know. So, even if you are not getting all the physical aspects as quickly as you might want to, the mental fortitude makes up for a lot. That builds your endurance, it builds your want, and builds your drive. It builds your motivation and through that and the opportunities that you have, it will take you further. (Michael, p. 5, lines 159-162)

### Jason

As soon as my interview with Michael had concluded he went back to the office and sent Jason for my last interview of the day. Jason was a 28-year-old Hispanic sophomore dance student. As Jason took his seat, I noticed he was wearing a tan sleeveless button up shirt with some top buttons left open. Jason was the oldest student I interviewed. He also started dancing at an older age (24) than any of the other participants. Jason had a calm demeanor but he projected confidence when he spoke. As this was my third interview in a row, I realized that I

only had a couple of minutes to write my reflective notes in between interviews. As the participants filled out the demographic questions I took the time to finish up my reflective notes on the previous participant. In the process of explaining my study to Jason and giving him the icebreaker question he mentioned something that I did not hear from Michael. He said there was a stereotype that dancing was for girls and not for boys. Another observation I had was that when he spoke he had a tendency to tap his feet. I would not describe the tapping as a nervous energy but maybe more of tapping to music or just being unable to sit still.

When speaking to Jason about physical challenges of being a dancer, he decided to speak to the emotional aspect as opposed to the physical body. He spoke about the times one can be down on oneself, feeling not good enough to succeed. There are times when he doubts his own abilities or when he see others succeeding in areas that he is struggling in. He mentioned that dancers have to be mentally tough enough to persevere and push thru the temporary roadblocks. Financially, Jason informed me that the dance program assists their students by providing food, snacks, and costumes. He believes that it is important to have another job to supplement the income of a dancer. On the other hand, he understands that managing a work schedule around a school schedule also presents challenges. Jason depends on his job to pay for his dance education because he no longer receives financial aid.

Receiving a college education was important to Jason's parents. However, they were not fond of his decision to become a dance major. They would have preferred him to select a major with more stable job prospects. After watching him perform, however, they started to show more support. At this point, Jason feels that they are just happy that he is receiving a college education. Some of Jason's friends tell him they think his major is cool, but others ask him what

he plans to do with a degree in dance. This question is a common one that I have heard from numerous of my participants. It seems that the general public has ambiguous views on what career options are available for dance students.

Jason is very flexible with his future plans. He can picture himself doing many different things after he graduates. He told me he wants to pursue a bachelor's degree in dance performance and at some point work toward a master's degree. He is not sure what field he will earn his master's degree in, but he is leaning towards education or business. He says he can see himself traveling on tour with a company or becoming a choreographer. Jason says it has always been his dream to travel the world on tour. Part of his thought process of taking business courses for his master's degree is that he is considering possibly opening his own dance company in the future after he tours. His goals are to improve as much as he can as a dancer.

When I asked him about his experiences, struggling with a dance activity, he said that is something that happens often. He recalled a time where he struggled and was later able to succeed. He remembers learning his first choreography and how difficult it was, but he was later able to pick it up. During the process of learning the choreography, he remembered feeling frustrated with himself. The teacher pulled him aside and told him to take a break because doing it over and over again would only lead to more frustration. I followed up with Jason and asked if he ever consider quitting after struggling with an exercise and he said:

That is something, too, our professors have always told us. As dancers, we always hit a certain point where we just level out for a while. Then, that's when most people think I am not learning anymore, I am doing very bad and they start getting really self-conscious. But it just means you are going to get better. Everyone goes through it. Again Jason believes that struggling is just part of the process and that everyone goes through it. (Jason, p. 3, lines 100-103)

Jason is very satisfied with the education he is currently receiving. He says he believes the program is preparing him for future auditions and even the bachelor's program. He has a good understanding of the job market and understands it will be competitive. However, he thinks it all depends on the individual. Jason elaborated by saying:

There are so many dancers out there that want the same thing. But it's all about the drive. You really need to want it. You need to show that you need to fight for it basically (Jason, p. 5, lines 143-145).

Jason has a very optimistic attitude. He described the lifestyle of being a professional dancer as being awesome. He believes there are many possibilities, and he is open to most of the opportunities that dance has to offer.

### Summary

In this chapter I introduced six students seeking an associate's degree in dance. I provided demographic information of the students and interview summaries from each participant. I also shared their views and experiences using their own words. The stories of their lived experiences detail their personal journey as dance students in college. In Chapter 5, I will discuss a number of themes I discovered over the course of my participant interviews.

## CHAPTER 5 GIVING VOICES TO THE FEET

### Introduction

This chapter will address the thematic findings of the data I collected from my interviews with participants. I will describe how the findings relate to the two research questions. The data collected from the six participants were gathered from demographic questions, semi-structured interviews, and field notes. By conducting interviews I was able to obtain information on the individual journeys of students seeking an associate's degree in dance performance. Themes emerged in the interviews that gave descriptive perspectives from these students. By re-listening to the interviews and reviewing the transcriptions, I was able to group repeated ideas. The interviews, according to Saldana (2013), describe what is occurring, and the themes consist of the descriptions of behavior within the culture. Phenomenological research addresses what it is like to be or to live as the population of study (Saldana, 2013). Finally, a summary concludes the chapter.

### Themes

After completing my interviews, I decided to listen to the interviews a second time to really absorb what the interviewees were saying. In addition, I reviewed the transcripts numerous times to search for commonalities among the participants' responses. I was able to highlight key ideas from the transcripts and field notes from each individual participant. After listing all of the key ideas from each individual I then cross referenced those statements to search for commonalities. In detail I created six lists in total, one for each participant. An example of a

participant list can be found in (Appendix E). On those lists I placed key words and statements that stood out to me. I then compared those words and statements among the participants in order to find patterns or general meanings (Moustakas, 1994). For my next step I then created a final master list (Appendix F) where I listed all of the key ideas that were put forth by at least three participants. This was my first step in data reduction. From this review, a list of 18 potential major themes emerged. These were the ideas I placed in the thematic matrix displayed in Table 5. The next step in the data reduction process was to group the data, combining similar themes into meaningful components while suspending assumptions in order to provide unbiased descriptions (Wertz, 2005).

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of pre-major dance students seeking their Associate in Arts degree in college. From the thematic matrix several themes were grouped together based on relationship to the theoretical framework. From the original 18 themes on the matrix, the following six major themes emerged:

1. Going to college (college important to parents)
2. Pushing forward (push forward, overcoming struggle, temporary doubt)
3. Dance as a calling (love for dance, it makes me happy, dance is a family, this is a calling)
4. Career expectations/Plan B (wants to travel, field is competitive, hard lifestyle, double major, pursuing a Bachelor's in dance)
5. Watching others and others watching me (modeling others, happy for others)
6. Costs and support (costumes/cost, what can you do with that, dad/parents not happy)

Table 5

*Thematic Matrix*

Theme	Ellen	Lizzy	Wanda	Bethany	Michael	Jason
Costumes/Cost	X	X	X			X
Love for dance	X	X	X	X		X
College important to parents	X		X	X	X	X
Dad/Parents not happy	X	X	X		X	X
What can you do with that			X	X	X	X
Pursuing bachelor's in dance		X	X	X	X	X
Wants to travel			X	X		X
Double major		X		X	X	X
Happy for others	X	X	X	X		X
Dance is a family	X		X			X
Overcome dance struggles	X		X		X	X
Pushing forward	X		X	X		X
Field is competitive	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hard lifestyle	X	X	X		X	X
This is a calling	X	X	X	X	X	X
It makes me happy			X	X	X	
Modeling others			X	X	X	X
Temporary doubt		X	X		X	



## Theme 1: Going to College

An important element to being a dance student in college is the desire to be a college student. When questioning the participants in the study, I wanted to know if going to college was not just important to them but if it was important to their parents as well. Ellen stated that her receiving a college education was important to her parents. She even went so far as to say that:

If you don't go to college you are basically out of the house (Ellen, p. 1, line 25).

When answering the question of importance of having a college education, Wanda almost implied that not going to college would not have been a problem for her parents. She mentioned they would support her if she did something that she really wanted to do. However, in a follow-up question she admitted:

They would have wanted me to go to college (Wanda, p.2, line 41).

Wanda suggested that she was never pressured to go to college, as she really wanted to attend college herself.

During my interview with Michael, he told me that his mother always encouraged him to go to college. Other family members had also discussed college, and he believed it was always important to everyone. Thus, Michael basically knew he would go to college. Michael told me:

I had that plan in my life that college will be in my life (Michael, p.2, line 41).

This is an example of how family can have an influence on the student. Michael, from an early age, always had college as a plan for him. Jason also stated that receiving a college education was important to his parents. Even though they were not initially supportive for him to have

dance as a major, he mentioned they were more concerned about his obtaining an overall education. Jason stated:

they were more concerned about getting an overall education. A degree in something that I can take on afterwards (Jason, p.1, line 26).

## Theme 2: Pushing Forward

Pushing forward addresses several topics discussed by participants in the study. Pushing forward is comprised of overcoming dance struggles, the idea of pushing forward, and dealing with temporary doubt. When I asked Ellen if she recalled times where she struggled with dance and later overcame those struggles, she replied:

Every single ballet class (Ellen, p.3, line 91).

Ellen gave me two examples of times she labored through dance activities, only to overcome her struggle.

When I was younger and I first got my splits it was one of those moments where it was difficult, it was difficult and then I finally got it. You get a very excited feeling. Your heart starts beating fast, and you say I can do it, I can do it. And you push yourself further. (Ellen, p. 3 lines 92-95)

In this example Ellen could have easily attempted her splits and quit when she could not complete the desired position. But she progressed enough that it gave her hope to continue. She continued trying until she eventually got the split and as a result she was rewarded by having accomplished the task. Like Ellen, Lizzy described periods of time where she had temporary doubt. When I asked her if she had ever considered changing her major, she said:

Sometimes I thought of that and then I'm like no. I can't see myself doing anything else. And I don't let that get the best of me either (Lizzy, p. 3 line 78).

Similar to Ellen's response, it seems as if the students know if they push forward and continue they will eventually make progress. Lizzy further stated:

It is a temporary moment that I am, like, I don't want to. And then I am, like, I got this, I can do this (Lizzy, p. 3 line 81).

Wanda also suggested that she has struggled many times just to overcome her challenge. She said:

Which one of so many times? (Wanda, p. 4 line 127).

Like Ellen, when Wanda struggled, she continued trying and saw the progress she made. Wanda shared the following:

I saw that change from not being able to do three pushups to now do 20 and then plank for a minute. I would say that was one of the biggest things that I was proud of, finally" (Wanda, p. 4 lines 134-136).

Wanda was also able to elaborate on pushing forward and having temporary doubts. She recalled struggling in a class and thinking dance may not be the major for her. She said:

I kept thinking I was not meant to do this. Because I couldn't. It was so hard (Wanda, p. 5 line 145).

Expanding on the topic, Wanda further discussed her doubts:

You need to push yourself. So once I came here and I started growing and I saw the change, I understood. Oh my gosh, this is definitely what I can do. I can actually do this. So having those struggles being so bad and then seeing the change and seeing how even if it was once, I got it right. And even if I struggle a whole few months, I got it for finally the 4<sup>th</sup> month. That is what literally push me that I can do this. (Wanda, p. 5, lines 156-161)

Bethany had a clear understanding about her struggles with dance. She knew that dance is hard and that challenges will come and go. Bethany stated:

Dance is just really hard. Whatever I can't do, I just ask questions, and try my best to succeed in it (Bethany, p. 3, line 86).

Michael, like Ellen and Wanda, said he struggles quite often. When I asked him directly if he remembered a moment when he struggled, he said:

Almost all of the time (Michael, p. 4, line 121).

Michael never considered changing majors, but he had some doubts if dance was meant for him.

But he knew the feelings are temporary. Michael elaborated by saying:

What if it isn't meant for me kind of thing? But those moments, they never last or anything. It's usually. . .it blows over really quickly. I am already here, have to finish it anyways no matter what. It's all I have. and I know that. those moments are really quick and they don't happen often. (Michael, p. 4 lines 135-138)

Jason had an understanding that dance can be difficult. He also realized there is a mental side to dancing, and if he sees his peers succeeding while he is struggling he may think he is not good enough to dance. So, being mentally tough is something Jason developed. By pushing forward, he kept his academic commitment. Jason said

So just having that emotional and motivation to keep pushing on and continue even when you want to give up. There have been plenty of times where I wanted to be like 'no I don't want to do this. It's too hard. I am not good enough'. But you have to get through it and continue. (Jason, p. 1, lines 9-11)

Through experience, Jason has accepted the ups and downs that come with dance training. Having doubts and feeling that one is not developing skills or making progress is natural for dancers. Jason described this to me by saying:

I am doing very bad and I start getting really self-conscious. But it just means you are going to get better. Everyone goes through it (Jason, p. 3, line 102).

Jason reiterated a thought that most of the other participants before him had stated with regard to the moments of struggle prior to overcoming a challenge:

It happens all the time (Jason, p. 3, line 85).

Challenges will come and some things just take longer amounts of time to learn or master. This is part of the growing pains for a dancer. Jason explained:

You have to have that mindset where you can't give up and you have to push forward until you get it (Jason, p. 3, line 87).

Frustration can build by doing something over and over again and failing at it repeatedly. It was Jason's view that even though it is frustrating at the moment, that if he pushes through and takes his time eventually he will pick it up. Jason stated he was advised to:

Just take a breather and we will come back to it later. If you don't get something, you want to work towards it but you don't want to keep doing it over and over again and not getting it and getting more frustrated with yourself. (Jason, p. 3, lines 93-95)

### Theme 3: Dance as a Calling

Dance as a calling is comprised of feelings of love for dance, and happiness for oneself and others. In addition, this theme includes identifying peers as a second family and dance being a calling. Of all of the participants, Ellen had the most experience dancing. Dance has been an outlet for her for many years. Because dance had been part of her life for so long, she decided it was something that she needed to continue. Ellen commented on her choice as follows:

Coming out of high school, knowing how much I depend on it, and how much I loved it, there was no other choice for me. I knew that was my calling (Ellen, p. 1, lines 17-19).

At a second point in our conversation, she shared that:

you don't choose dance, dance chooses you (Ellen, p. 3, line 106).

The mentality seemed to be that dance was meant to be. During my interview with Ellen, I discussed her feelings when her peers were succeeding in dance. She described her feelings to me by saying:

I am very proud of them. We are all a big family (Ellen, p. 3, line 84).

This was interesting to me, as I suspected most dancers would be too competitive to truly root for another dancer, but Ellen believed that as a group everyone supported each other. Lizzy had similar feelings. When asked how she felt when her peers did well she indicated that she:

felt happy for them (Lizzy, p. 2, line 61).

Towards the end of my interview with Wanda, she shared with me the joy she has from dancing. She said:

Wherever I am, if I am dancing, I am happy (Wanda, p. 7, line 204).

When predicting her future career options, she revealed to me her love for dancing. She said:

I would totally love it. It's what I love to do (Wanda, p. 7, line 207).

For Wanda, being a dancer was an easy choice because she has always excelled in dance. When I asked her about her feelings when her peers do well, she, like her colleagues, described being happy for them. She said:

Honestly, I am one of the people that I get happy when people do things right (Wanda, p. 4, line 116).

Unlike other participants, Wanda did mention that when she sees others being successful, it does bring out her sense of competition.

I feel it's a good energy when there is a little bit of difference between people and different energies if there is a little competition when it's good to push each other further (Wanda, p. 4, lines 120-122).

I enjoyed hearing this perspective which broadened, to some extent, the reactions to other's successes.

Bethany has been dancing since the age of 9. She told me:

I love dance. All I do is talk about dance and do dance (Bethany, p. 1, line 11).

By enjoying dance so much at an early age, dance just seemed like a good fit for a career. She, like the other respondents, identified having fun being a dancer or having success as a dancer and that continuing pleasure led them to their choice of major. Bethany elaborated, sharing her reasons:

Because I literally can't live without dance. Dance is my everything. So if I can have a job that I love to do, I have done pretty much my whole life, that is my dream come true (Bethany, p. 4, line 101).

Bethany enjoys the company of her dance peers and the environment of the dance program. She also feels that dance is a calling. Bethany stated:

So, having that mentality and knowing that I am meant to be here and they know that I am supposed to be here. I love that. I love the atmosphere and the people here (Bethany, p. 3, line 96).

Bethany roots for her peers. She did not mention being jealous of the success of others. Instead, she said:

I am happy for them. I think everyone deserves an opportunity especially in dance cause the dance world is very small, so when someone gets an opportunity it's fantastic (Bethany, p. 3, line 70).

Unlike the other participants in the study, Michael had the least amount of dance training at only two years. With that being said I was curious to see if he had the same kind of affinity for dance as the other participants. Michael has been around dance for many years because he

was involved in entertainment. He also liked learning dance moves based on watching videos.

Michael described his interest in dance as a calling:

Well... dance is a calling since I didn't really choose. You don't really choose it sometimes, it chooses you. I have always been, this has always been in my life some way or another. I never really did it professionally or anything but I danced to music and stuff or I learned dances in music videos and stuff like that. So, I guess you can say it's one of those things I really felt could be a calling to me. I felt that I could do. (Michael, p. 1, lines 10-14)

Michael, like the other participants, told me he would be happy for his peers if they were doing well. However, like Wanda, he did mention the competitive feeling that takes place when others are succeeding.

Honestly, maybe sometimes I little bit jealous but it's not something that would be a problem. Just a little bit of the competitiveness in you. You have to be competitive in this area but obviously, I am always going to be happy for them. (Michael, p. 4, lines 110-112)

Michael spoke about being happy for others. Happiness was an emotion he used in describing what his future would be like:

Happy, usually it's the first adjective I can say (Michael, p. 6, line 187).

Jason also had limited dance experience (four years) compared to the other participants..

His was my final interview. Knowing how the other participants had responded, I was surprised to learn that he also believed that dance was a calling. He said,

I fell in love with it. You can tell when you are meant to do something and dancing is something I have always wanted to do since I tried it. There is nothing else I want to do. You just know. (Jason, p. 1, line 19).

Jason also described his dance peers as a family and described how they supported each other:

Here, we are all a big family and we have each other's backs and we are pushing each other to be better than we are even if we are lacking self-confidence (Jason, p. 3, line 78).



Jason had a unique perspective when answering how he felt about the success of his peers. He seemed to say that being in the group served as positive reinforcement and was another reason to help motivate people to push themselves:

I am happy for them. You always want to push them to be better. Especially if you see those people who are really motivated and inspired and passionate about what it is they are doing. You always want to be, not welcoming but you want to be like you can do it. You are capable of so much more. (Jason, p. 3, lines 74-77)

#### Theme 4: Career Expectations/Plan B

When discussing possible future plans, Ellen told me that she did not plan on pursuing dance in her bachelor's degree. She was interested in becoming a dance therapist. She indicated that she just was not confident in the stability of a career in dance, saying,

It would be incredibly difficult. I know it would be hard living paycheck to paycheck, not knowing if you are going to get this next job, not knowing when the next job is going to come around. That is why I know a lot of people who want to be a professional dancer go into the teaching field. They have a consistent paycheck. (Ellen, p. 5, lines 153-156)

She was very aware of the possibilities of not being a successful dancer. Based on our discussion, it seemed that she wanted a career with better job prospects. She said:

The problem is everything is so competitive. If you don't get a job, you don't get a job. That is a big issue with becoming a professional dancer (Ellen, p. 5, lines 143-145).

Lizzy indicated that she expected to pursue a bachelor's degree in dance in the future.

She was also open to double majoring so as to have a back-up plan. She said:

I can always double major which I think I am going to do. I am really good at science, and I like science. So I am thinking I will be a physical therapist and then get specialized in dance injuries (Lizzy, p. 2, line 38).

I was not surprised she was considering adding another career skill. But I do remember thinking that she and Ellen both found other careers that were still linked to dance. In discussing her future, she envisioned herself as:

being a studio teacher or studio owner (Lizzy, p. 3, line 42).

She had a grim outlook on the job prospects for a dancer after graduation, mentioning a competitive job market and the difficulties with job placement. Despite the difficulties, she also saw a silver lining, noting that she would be doing what she loved:

It will be hard but it will be worth it in the end. Of course, you don't get paid that much. So that's hard on one. But you have to do what you love. It's worth it in the end (Lizzy, p. 4, line 108).

When discussing expectations and outcomes, Bethany mentioned she was expecting to be a double major in the future. She was interested in completing a bachelor's degree but would also like to take up photography. As noted in the following statement, Bethany was considering taking pictures of dancers:

Yes. I eventually want to go to a four-year school and double major with something, to join it with dance. I was thinking of going into photography. I love looking at pictures and taking pictures. I want to combine it with dance cause I can eventually go on to taking pictures for dancers. (Bethany, p. 2, lines 40-42)

Bethany also pictured herself traveling one day with a dance company. It seemed that traveling the world or the states was something that was appealing to the participants. Bethany stated:

I'll be happy, traveling, getting to meet other people in the world and getting to dance with people who I am used to and the atmosphere (Bethany, p. 4, line 116).

I felt that Bethany was very optimistic about her future in dance. She gave little attention to any of the financial challenges of being a dancer or the difficulties of finding a job. She just mentioned that dance was a:

competitive field (Bethany, p. 4, line 114).

Michael was planning on working toward his bachelor's degree in dance once he graduates with his associate degree. He understood that education will be his best form of training. Michael never mentioned having another career interest besides dance but said he has thought about his options:

I have considered double majoring or finding something else that... I don't want to say back up, but it is a backup. For something else so I can have that (Michael, p. 5, line 164).

The thought of double majoring may have occurred based on Michael's confidence in the job market for dancers. He had a strategy that he believes will help him be chosen for auditions. Michael elaborated on his plan to network with his peers in hopes that will help him as he pursues employment opportunities in the future:

There are opportunities and finding the right ones and being there at the right time I guess. Knowing where to look for them. Having guidance also helps. Maybe at that point when I am done with school and everything that I will have a good support system and people that I can go to that I can talk to and ask advice. Point me in the right direction" (Michael, p. 6, lines 182-185).

Michael understands that the job market will be competitive but he still feels that if he makes the right connections that will lead him to opportunities:

People that I know or connections to other companies that can get me in to an audition and that can get me a good word in (Michael, p. 6, lines 174-176).

Like Michael, Jason was also considering earning his bachelor's degree in dance and possibly picking up a second major. He did not really know exactly what he wanted to focus on to compliment his dance degree, but he had narrowed his options to at least two areas of focus as discussed in the following statement.

I don't know if I want to teach at a university. It would probably be more for business and teaching combine in a way. Where I can go to the community and teach people who are interested in dancing (Jason, p. 2, lines 45-47).

To teach at a university, Jason realized he would have to earn a master's degree in dance.

From talking to Jason I could see him doing many things. He could be a performer for some time and then perhaps become a dance instructor. Jason also envisioned himself doing many different types of dance jobs:

I eventually want to get my masters. I haven't decided exactly what else I want to do. I know eventually I want to teach and choreograph and own my own company. I want to travel in a tour. I want to do it all. I just don't know where master wise on top of dancing, what other field I want to combine it with. (Jason, p. 2, lines 40-43)

Again the topic of traveling came up. I could see Jason's vision as he said:

Obviously, I covered it but I first want to get the chance to perform on stage and travel the world tour. It's always been one of my dreams, to tour and travel, and visit other countries and stuff (Jason, p. 2, line 50).

Jason was also very optimistic that if he tries hard enough he can find stable employment in dance. When commenting on the job market, Jason said:

The job market? It's not going to be easy. There are so many dancers out there that want the same thing. But it's all about the drive. You really need to want it. You need to show that you need to fight for it basically. I know going into the dance field wasn't going to be an easy task. But if you have enough motivation and the drive for it, then you are capable of anything. (Jason, p. 6, lines 143-146)

## Theme 5: Watching Others and Others Watching Me

When discussing vicarious learning I was trying to determine to what extent the participants modeled the behavior of their peers. I was also examining where they positioned themselves in their class based on their confidence--if they were comfortable being in front of the class to set an example for the others or if they were not sure of their ability and preferred to watch others. When Ellen spoke to me, she seemed confident in her abilities. She indicated that her positioning in class was based on her comfort. Ellen said:

I am not getting distracted by them. I put my good side where I can see everybody so if they mess up, I can keep going easily. Whereas on my bad side, I can focus specifically on myself and not have to worry about distractions. (Ellen, p. 3. Lines 79-82)

Ellen and Lizzy had similar responses in reference to watching others. Watching others is a way to compare your skills to others by watching them in action. Lizzy reported that she chooses not to watch others, stating:

I feel I get to see more and I don't stare at other people. I don't look. I am focusing more on myself and what I need to do (Lizzy, p. 2, line 54).

Unlike Ellen and Lizzy, Wanda had a different perspective on her placement in class.

Wanda seemed to be more flexible on her positioning based on her comfort level, noting that:

I would always go in the back. I would focus on me, I would focus on everyone, and on the teacher. But coming here to xxxxx, I think it's better sometimes if I change places all the time. If I feel I need to be in the front to learn the choreography and then I can go back and work on myself. When everyone is doing it together, I can be with everyone. So I have learned to adjust to whatever I need to do at the moment. (Wanda, p. 4, lines 107-112)

Wanda was the first to give me a response where she admitted to watching her peers:

Some days, you are really good into focusing and you can be in the front and you don't need to look at anyone else. Some days, you just need patience with yourself and it's

good to look around you and it's good to try things a little slower sometimes. (Wanda, p. 4, lines 112-114)

Wanda returned to the subject of watching others in responding to a separate question in which she opened up more and shared more of her experiences with me::

But when my peers do things right, it inspires me that we are a group, we are all together, we can all do the same thing. Sometimes if everyone else is good, of course it's sad but that pushes me to be better next time. I feel it's a good energy when there is a little bit of difference between people and different energies if there is a little competition when it's good to push each other further. (Wanda, p. 4, lines 118-122)

This response gave me so much information about Wanda. Watching others inspired her because knowing her that peers were successful gave her a sense of competition. She also knew that the tasks were achievable if her peers were executing them properly. Also, by watching others she was measuring her own skills and contributing to her own self-efficacy.

Modeling behavior is not limited to one's peers. It can also include teachers as well. When speaking to the participants about vicarious learning, I became more comfortable asking follow-up questions on this subject to try and gather more data on the student experience. When speaking to Bethany, she also responded to me by saying she was interested in focusing on herself and not watching her peers. However, she did mention trying to position herself in the front so she could place her attention on the teacher:

I don't have to look at anyone in front of me. I have to think about it myself and figure it out. And when we go to the center, I try to stand in front so I can see what the teacher is demonstrating so I can do exactly what she did (Bethany, p. 2, lines 55-57).

Jason mentioned that his positioning in class was related to his confidence:

When I first started, I wasn't confident enough to know what I was doing. I never danced before. So I was like 'eh'. So I stayed in the back and watched other people. But the more I become more comfortable, I pick up things faster and I understand what it is that she is teaching us. I will be more up front. (Jason, p. 2, lines 62-67)

Since Jason started dancing so late in his life, his dance experience was limited. Based on our conversation, I sensed that he was still learning to be comfortable with his abilities.

### Theme 6: Costs and Support

Dance students face challenges such as cost of supplies, lack of parental support and the ambiguity of dance. In addition, the physicality of dance can also present a challenge. When speaking to Ellen she the challenges finances present:

Fees can be rather pricey but, dance shoes can be incredibly expensive. The point shoes I used to wear cost about at the time, \$120 per pair. Those can get expensive. Costumes can get expensive. Costumes can add to thousands of dollars. That can be a struggle. (Ellen, p. 1, lines 8-11)

Physically, Ellen discussed having to deal with several injuries. However, most important to me in our conversation were her comments about parental support. Even though her parents encouraged college, her mother was the only one who was fully supportive of her being a dance major. She relayed her father's concerns:

My dad was not happy at all. He wanted me to go into something more science based. He wanted me to go into engineering at one point. Then he wanted me to go into business (Ellen, p. 1, lines 32-34).

She reported that her father was slowly warming to the idea of her being a dance major.

Lizzy also mentioned cost when she listed her challenges:

Dance does cost a lot of money. A lot of money (Lizzy, p. 1, line 2).

In general, Lizzy had succinct responses to my questions, but I was surprised by her answer regarding her parents' reaction to her major. She described her father's reaction as follows:

My dad and grandpa on his side were very 'you are not going to go anywhere'. My dad told my mom that if I majored in it and I didn't have a job that I couldn't come home and live with him and all this kind of stuff. (Lizzy, p. 1, lines 21-23)

This sounded very harsh to me, but Lizzy seemed very confident in her choice. She said she was doing what she loved. The choice was simple for her no matter what type of criticism she would receive at home.

In regard to finances, Wanda informed me of her financial challenges with dance. She detailed several expenses and how they added up. Wanda said:

Financially, it is so hard (Wanda, p. 1, line 2).

Like most things, Wanda described the need to balance what is needed and what is necessary:

However sometimes you would like to have those pairs of shoes to help you do better on point or you would like that leotard that makes you look better for an audition. Its balancing that, it's really hard. And also knowing what your budget is, knowing what your parents can help you with, knowing what you should control if you have a job or knowing what financial aid will help you sometimes. (Wanda, p. 1, lines 3-7).

Similar to the other participants, Wanda received mixed support from her parents. When asked about her parents' reaction to her major she said:

My dad was expecting a bit more (Wanda, p. 2, line 44).

Her mother was supportive, but her father was more concerned. What was interesting about Wanda is that her older sister also was a dance major. Wanda shared that her sister was not able to make a career of it, and this is probably why her father was so concerned:

My sister did the same thing and she wasn't successful with it and he was really afraid (Wanda, p. 2, line 45).



Perhaps, parents would be more supportive if they knew all the options for work a dancer can have. There is a general lack of knowledge as to the career options for dance majors. Wanda shared the confusion of people's understanding of her major. She reported:

Yes, usually they ask. 'What are you studying?' 'Dance,' 'Just dance?' 'Yes, just dance.' 'What can you do with that?' (Wanda, p. 2, line 63).

Bethany's experience was similar to Wanda's. Bethany said when she tells others she is a dance major, they respond by asking what she can do with that degree. She then proceeds to inform them on the specifics:

They are surprised. They are like what can you do with that major as a degree? And I'm like you can actually do a lot. A lot of people don't know about dance and what you can do with it. So I love to inform them and show them. (Bethany, p. 2, lines 34-36)

Michael echoed Wanda and Bethany's comments regarding support, indicating that when he tells others he is a dance major, they begin to question him.

A couple of times I have had people with the question 'What are you going to do with that?' or 'Do you have a plan?' Those people, they usually, I just have to explain to them (Michael, p. 2, line 62).

The lack of clarity in regard to the dance profession leads to parents who struggle to support their children's decision. Michael recalled that when he told his mother he had chosen dance as a major, he had to defend his decision:

When I told her it was dance, she was like 'dance, what are you going to do with dance'. She would be like 'why don't you continue with acting. Acting has dance in it. You can incorporate that in theater'. So for a while I was, more so, just banter it's not what I wanted. Acting is not what I wanted. This is definitely what I want to do and it was more so convincing her that this is what I wanted to do and it was something that I could do something with. (Michael, p. 2, lines 49-54)

Jason had mentioned a challenge that I had yet to hear from the others. He mentioned that dancing could present an emotional challenge, that there was pressure to be good and there was plenty of competition in the field:

We are our biggest critics. We are always bashing ourselves for not being good enough or not being able to do something that we see other people that are more than capable of doing it. It's not an easy thing to be doing, career to choose. (Jason, p. 2, lines 2-5)

Jason also did not receive support from his parents regarding his decision to major in dance. He said:

They weren't too fond of it. They wanted me to choose something else (Jason, p. 1, line 30).

Jason knows that the lack of knowledge of the profession can lead to the assumption that the degree is limited in the career options it provides:

A lot of people don't know that there is more than just performing in that path of dancing. There are other things you can do besides just dance and perform on stage. I think that is where people lack that knowledge of well you are just going to be dancing, how far are you really going to get in life, a degree in that. (Jason, p. 2, lines 34-38)

### Triangulation

In an effort to confirm the themes that emerged from the research, participants were able to review their interview transcripts and the six highlighted themes. An e-mail was sent to each participant in the research, requesting a meeting to provide them with an opportunity to review a printed copy of the transcript and the themes. The process of member checking gave my participants a chance to analyze the findings and comment on the accuracy. During our face to face recap, the respondents were asked to provide their thoughts on the themes that emerged and add any feedback they felt necessary. Three of my respondents were supportive of the themes

introduced by the researcher. The consensus was that the themes were accurate. The other three participants were non responsive. Triangulation was also achieved by comparing transcripts to my field notes.

Research Questions: A Duet Between the Voices and the Scholarly Literature

The responses of participants (in their own words) have been used to answer the research questions which guided this study. The six major themes which emerged from the interviews will also be used to show the relationship between participant responses and the research questions. Going to college and dance as a calling, were themes that responded to Research Question 1. Pushing forward, career expectations/plan B, costs/support, and watching others and others watching me were themes that responded to Research Question 2. Table 6 links the major themes to the two research questions that provided direction for this study.

Table 6

*Relationship Between Research Questions and Major Thematic Findings*

Research Questions	Thematic Findings
1. What lead college students to a pre-major in dance?	Going to college Dance as a calling
2. How do dance majors in college make sense of their college journey?	Pushing forward Career expectations/Plan B Watching others and others watching me Costs and support

## Research Question 1

*What leads college students to a pre-major in dance?*

In their own words, participants were able to explain how they selected dance as a pre-major. Bethany was the fourth participant that I interviewed for my study. Like Wanda, she already had a desire to go to college and experience other opportunities. Bethany wanted to learn more about dance and other subjects. Bethany informed me:

that her parents never really went to college and that she was told ‘You have to go to college’ (Bethany, p.1, line 21).

From talking to my participants I was able to gather that even though the parents were not always supportive, they were at least happy that their children went to college. When talking to Lizzy, she described being a dance student as something that was just meant to be. Very early on in my conversation with Lizzy she mentioned how much she loved dancing, and she repeated that sentiment later in our conversation. She often referred to becoming a dancer as:

doing something you love (Lizzy, p. 1, line 4).

As a dancer for 10 years, Lizzy said that she could not see herself without dance:

I couldn’t see myself going to college and not doing it (Lizzy, p. 1, line 7).

This is something I could not relate too. Since I personally started dancing in college I was never able to have that identity growing up. For Lizzy, the choice of major almost seemed obvious. She was happy dancing and she wanted to continue challenging herself.

## Research Question 2

*How do dance majors in college make sense of their college journey?*

The college journey for dance majors is made up of multiple situations and emotions. The journey requires overcoming challenges and working towards anticipated outcomes. During my interview with Ellen, she proceeded to give me the following example of overcoming a challenging situation in her dance class at the college:

When we are doing something and she has crazy patterns going on. So when we finally understand the pattern, we get really excited and get really proud of ourselves and say ok let's do it 3 times in a row to make sure it sticks. It's one of those things where you get proud for a moment but then you keep going. (Ellen, p. 3 lines 96-99)

Thus, Ellen shared that overcoming the challenge made her want to persist, an example of academic commitment. Wanda discussed her anticipated career expectations. Wanda has always known that she wanted to earn a bachelor's degree, but she was not sure where she will go to earn the degree:

I am not sure where yet, I have an idea. But definitely want my bachelors (Wanda, p. 3, line 67).

Wanda is open to dancing and traveling with a dance company but her end goal was to be a college professor in dance. She was the first participant to mention wanting to travel with a dance company for work after graduation. When I asked her about her future goals, she responded by saying

I want to join a company but I also want to be a teacher at the same time (Wanda, p. 3, line 88).

Wanda's conversation indicated that she knows what she wants but understands that it will be difficult to predict her path because of the spontaneity of opportunities in the dance field. She also realized how challenging it would be to find a job in a competitive market:

It is definitely going to be hard. Even if we think we are good, it's never enough (Wanda, p. 6, 197).

Dancers also tend to watch their peers. They watch them for inspiration, to imitate them and they watch them to check out their competition. Based on my interviews it seemed that the more confident dancers are, the less likely they are to watch their peers. With Michael being one of my last interviews I was comfortable asking him follow-up questions. When discussing where he likes to position himself in the class, he described his comfort level, stating:

Maybe it will be more in the middle or around someone, people that I feel are the same energy kind of level or I feel comfortable being around (Michael, p. 3, line 98).

I felt the need to elicit more details from him so as to gain a deeper insight into his response. Michael eventually admitted to watching his peers, depending on how confident he was with the choreography, responding:

If I am not fully confident then I follow a little bit. It's not always something you want to do but (Michael, p. 4, line 103).

He also discussed watching others in a way to compare his skills to theirs. Michael said:

Honestly, maybe sometimes I little bit jealous but it's not something that would be a problem. Just a little bit of the competitiveness in you. You have to be competitive in this area but obviously, I am always going to be happy for them. I have my own strengths and weaknesses I have to acknowledge that. I acknowledge everyone else's strengths and weaknesses. I use that to kind of staple myself or just understand where I stand in certain levels and areas so I can see what this person is doing better than I can. (Michael, p. 4, lines 110-115)

### Summary

This chapter introduced the major themes that emerged from my interviews with the research participants. The themes that were identified emerged from the narratives of the participants. A content matrix was provided to show all the themes along with an explanation of the data reduction process. The participants also reviewed the transcripts to check for accuracy. The major themes identified were: (a) aspirations, (b) academic commitment, (c) emotional identification, (d) anticipated outcome/career expectations, (e) vicarious learning, and (f) challenges.

The participants in my study indicated having a strong passion for dance or a belief that they needed to become dance majors because it was a personal calling. Although many of the participants' parents were concerned by their selection of dance as a major, overall they were happy that their children were enrolled in college. Many of the concerns surrounding dance majors seemed to come from the ambiguity of career options. Participants frequently told me they were asked by friends and family what they could do with a dance degree. Many challenges were presented to the participants ranging from financial to physical. As the challenges were overcome, the participants' academic commitment was reinforced. The participants described feelings of motivation and excitement every time they moved past barriers. Also, in my research, I found that the classroom environment provided a mental challenge in itself. The classroom provided an opportunity for participants to show confidence in their abilities or to hide and try to blend in. The classroom led to feelings of competitiveness with peers as well as a feeling of family.

## CHAPTER 6 SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

This chapter contains the implications, limitations, and future recommendations associated with the study. The implications from this study were determined by the participants themselves as they discussed their own personal journeys as dance pre-majors in college. Although the research findings from this study may not be generalized beyond the research participants, I hope that the conclusions made will inspire institutions to reexamine the way they serve their dance student populations. In addition to the recommendations for future research, the chapter also includes a reflection from the researcher and a summary of findings.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to add to the body of literature regarding dance students in higher education. The objective of this qualitative research study was to hear, in their own words, the views of students as to their experiences in a dance program in a two-year college. Though the participants in this study came from different backgrounds and ranged in age, they shared many commonalities. These students expressed many of the same struggles and concerns about their futures. They were enrolled in college as dance pre-majors, some with intentions of continuing their education to complete a bachelor's degree. In this study, they exhibited their concerns about their future job prospects and how their passion for dance motivated them. The research also captured their experiences overcoming obstacles and what influenced them to become dance pre-majors in college. Participants shared their reactions to their challenges and



accomplishments, and the researcher incorporated their words into this report of the findings of the study. Six major themes emerged from the original 18 themes identified as a result of refining the data obtained through the six interviews that were conducted with participants. The themes were used to assist in answering the research questions which guided the study.

### Limitations

There were a number of limitations identified with this study. My own bias as a professional dancer might have been a limitation which I explained in my positionality. In addition, doing the interviews in the break before and after the participant's classes led to time constraints which may have impacted (e.g., shortened) the interviews. Finally, some of the interview questions were edited by the head of the dance department to meet her level of satisfaction. These changes were approved by my dissertation committee before proceeding with the interview.

### Implications

#### Implications for Future College Dance Students

The participants of this study all voiced their challenges and concerns. The experiences of the six participants in this study, shared through their own words, can give prospective students an idea of what they will encounter being a dance student in college. Prospective students can learn from the responses of the participants as they described their personal challenges that were physical, financial, and ambiguous in regard to the usefulness of the degree. This may permit prospective students to anticipate the difficulties that are associated with the

competitive field of dance. This study also detailed the academic commitment required and the concepts of pushing forward. In addition, prospective students can consider in advance strategies to use in informing their parents of their decision to major in dance. The researcher found, as have prior researchers, that there is strong parental concern and reservations toward this degree. By providing probable clear outcomes related to a dance major, parents can come to support their child's decision.

### Implications for Practice

Based on the research, it would appear that dance programs would benefit from advertising possible outcomes and what they have to offer students. This could potentially make it easier to recruit students who may have a difficult time informing their parents that they would like to be dance majors in college. The participants in my study mentioned expecting to have a hard life financially as a dancer, acknowledging the field is very competitive. However, none of the participants had a solution or shared any information provided to them that addresses these concerns.

There seems to be a conflict in preparing these students to become the best dancers they can be and giving them other skills that can be beneficial to them. Four of the six participants in the study indicated they were considering a double major in their bachelor's degree programs. This is an indicator that they would like to expand their career options.

In regard to the environment of the dance program, based on my findings these participants reported truly enjoying dancing, and half of them mentioned that their peers in the dance program were almost like a family to them. This type of personal connection to their peers

and the college will benefit not only the students but increase the attractiveness of the college's dance program.

The literature review revealed that dancer students have shown an ability to persist regardless of the monetary reward. Driving factors such as students' levels of self-efficacy can determine if they stay in dance education. However, making a living remains a concern for dance students. Programs need to address the issue of future sustainable employment opportunities if they are going to ease these concerns raised by students.

Part of the conflict between parents and dance students is that parents who have been supportive of their children's early dance experiences may not be as supportive if dance becomes a career goal. To first address this, dance programs should have more informational materials online and on paper. These materials can be used to market more effectively what the program has to offer in terms of outcomes. This decreases fear of the unknown, and parents as well as students can see a viable path and career options available. Secondly, the cohort environment is a positive one for these students, and this needs to continue. Dance students may not all be in the same classes, but they can practice together and perform dance showcases for the school. This builds a sense of family and a support group for students. In addition, it also promotes a sense of community. This can also have positive effects on students' academic commitment.

#### Implications for Administrators

It was apparent in this study that the happiness of dancing overshadowed the fact that some of these participants (i.e., dancers) needed a second job to survive financially and remain in college. The students interviewed had experienced enough joy dancing that they decided to select dance as a major in spite of the risks of sporadic employment in their futures. Students

have options to continue their educations in dance after their pre-major or select a different path. Students can also decide to double major.

The first recommendation for administrators is to strive to develop a more diverse curriculum. In the review of literature, examples were cited of curricula being broadened to include business classes. During my research, one of the participants was also considering learning photography so she could also take pictures of dance students. This is another example of how elective credits could be integrated into the curriculum to provide different tracks and encourage students to develop skills that may improve their employability and broaden their career options.

A second recommendation is for program advisors to encourage their students to discuss their future plans. Even if their current dance programs have no other options other than dance performance, students can change their goals after completing pre-major degrees. These conversations will benefit students by better preparing them to make decisions after graduation that will impact their long term success.

The third recommendation is that the dance program should explore opportunities for partnerships with other related programs. Collaborating with the business department on campus could possibly benefit dance students by helping them with teaching or entrepreneurship goals. Working with education and business departments at neighboring universities could also benefit students with a pre-major who transfer and are faced with formalizing their future plans.

Furthermore, taking dance courses does not necessarily guarantee you will be an effective dance teacher. My final recommendation is offer a course specifically designed for teaching dance courses. Identifying students who have some interest in becoming dance teachers and

giving them teacher assistant opportunities where they can lead some exercises and choreography in class would be a good first step.

### Recommendations for Future Research

As previously stated, some of my initial interview questions were edited to meet the satisfaction of the head of the dance department. I believe this was to protect the integrity of the program curriculum. I would suggest that future researchers should develop a strong rapport with a major professor in the department where they are intend to conduct research. Also one could carefully plan for follow-up questions that supplement the interview protocol.

Future research could be conducted to follow up with the students after their graduation to gain reflections on prior experiences and the college's dance curriculum. Researchers would gain valuable information as to graduates' sense of preparedness, regrets, and recommendations in regard to the college's dance program.

A second recommendation would be to conduct a longitudinal, quantitative study following a larger number of participants of pre-major dance students through their college years into their post-college career lives. The study would be able to better assess the outcomes for pre-major dance students specifically in regard to employability.

If I were given the opportunity to begin this research anew, I would compensate the students in order to attract more participants and have a larger data base. In my opinion, this would also help recruit students at a faster pace. I completed three interviews fairly quickly only to wait several weeks to complete the final three. Also, compensating participants may have

enhanced their interest in the study and their willingness to respond fully to questions posed to them.

### Researcher's Reflection

Writing this dissertation was quite a journey in itself. I have never conducted a qualitative research study prior to this one. At the beginning of my prospectus class I originally considered researching different student populations. It was not until I had a discussion with my major college professor that I realized I could complete a dissertation on a topic that was a little more personal to me. At that time, I had never realized that anyone had already completed research on dance students. I assumed the literature on the topic was limited. And in some ways, I was correct. In comparison to the harder sciences, the literature on dance is slightly less developed. On the other hand, I was surprised to realize over the course of my literature review that there were so many articles written about dance.

During the time I was working on my literature review, I was able to refine my ideas. I decided I wanted to research the processes and driving forces behind the scenes for this population. When deciding on a theoretical framework, I examined other theories that may have been suitable. However, I selected social cognitive career theory because it had numerous tenets and building blocks that I believed were closely related to dancers. Items such as vicarious learning, perceiving personal accomplishments, and self-efficacy are just some examples of the tenets I believed needed to be explored in relation to dance students. I also selected the community college dance student population because during my research I did not find any literature on this exact student population. The research process really brought to life for me the

fact that no matter how different these participants were, they all shared many similar experiences.

### Summary

In this chapter, I provided the purpose of the study, limitations, and implications. The implications provided were for future college dance students, the practice, and the administrators. In addition, recommendations for future research were also presented. Finally, a reflection of the researcher was also provided.

### CLOSING VIGNETTE

As the semester was coming to an end, Kelly realized that she was unwilling to move for a job, no matter how good it was. Knowing that many of the good dance jobs are in different cities, she came to a realization. Unable to commit to dance as a career, Kelly decided to major in an area related to dance. She decided when she transferred to the university for her bachelor's degree that she would major in business. Her goal is to open up a dance studio locally in her community. Eventually her parents would come to support Kelly in whatever she decides because ultimately they are happy that she is enrolled in college. Seeing Kelly graduate from college is something her parents have always hoped for, and they are looking forward to that day. Kelly still loves dancing and performing, but she is excited to explore this alternative profession in the dance field.



APPENDIX A  
EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

## Dance Students at a Two Year College: Making Sense of Their Academic, Cultural and Social World

Dear Participant,

My name is Benjamin Lopez and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education and Policy Studies program at the University of Central Florida. I am conducting research on the experiences of dance students at a two year college and am seeking your assistance for my study. The purpose of this study is to understand what motivates dance students to persist and graduate with a degree in dance. The procedure will consist of a qualitative interview. Your participation will involve email and phone correspondence along with a face to face interview. A participant confirmation letter and informed consent form will be emailed to you prior to the interview.

The interview will take place at a mutually convenient time and location. The duration of the interview will be no longer than an hour and the interview will consist of open-ended questions. The questions will be provided to you prior to the interview. If you have any questions about the study please feel free to contact me [Benjaminlopez@bellsouth.net](mailto:Benjaminlopez@bellsouth.net) 407-927-0579. Your identity will not be associated with this study in order to ensure confidentiality.

Thank you for your time and efforts with this study. Your assistance will help add scholarly literature on the topic of dance students in higher education.

Thank you very much,  
Benjamin Lopez  
Doctoral Candidate  
College of Education  
University of Central Florida

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## Script

Thank you for your time and participation in my study. The purpose of this study is to examine your experiences as a dance student. Experiences such as motivations, difficulties, and anticipated outcomes are all areas of my research interest. The data I collect as well as your identity will be completely confidential. If at any time you wish to withdraw from the study you have the right to do so. You can also choose not to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable during our discussion. If you do not have any questions at this time, we will proceed.

## Icebreaker

What has been your greatest dance achievement? How did it make you feel?

## Part 1

1. Age \_\_\_\_\_
2. Race \_\_\_\_\_
3. Gender \_\_\_\_\_
4. Class Standing
5. Are you a first generation college student?
6. What is your marital status?
7. Do you have any children?
8. What job do you currently hold?
9. How many years of dance training do you have?
10. When did you first realize you wanted to be a dance major in college?
11. Do you receive financial aid (loans, grants, or scholarships)?
12. At what age did you take your first formal dance lesson?

## Part 2

### **Barriers/Challenges**

- 1) Describe the challenges you have faced so far becoming a dancer. (Such as physical, financial)
- 2) How are you paying for your college education?

### **Family/Peer**

- 3) How did your immediate family react to the selection of your major?
- 4) Was receiving a college education important to your parents?
- 5) What did people think about your major selection of dance education? Describe their reaction.

### **Career Interests**

- 6) What are the reasons you decided on dance as your major?
- 7) Do you plan on going for a Bachelor's degree in dance? Please explain why.
- 8) Do you see yourself becoming a professional dance teacher, performer in a company, or owner of a studio in the future? Please explain.
- 9) What are your short term and long term career goals?

**Vicarious Learning**

10) Where do you position yourself during class at the barre or in the center? Why?

11) How do you feel when your peers do well?

**Self-Efficacy**

12) Do you remember a moment in dancing when you were struggling and then you got it? How did you feel?

13) Do you recall struggling at an exercise or in class and thinking that you may not want to continue in this field?

14) How do these challenges you face sustain your career goals?

**Satisfaction**

15) How satisfied are you with the education you are receiving?

16) Have you ever considered changing your major?

**Outcome Expectations**

17) What are your expectations from being an A.A. college graduate?

18) What are your expectations from receiving a Bachelor's degree in dance?

19) What are your expectations of the job market for dance students?

20) What do you think your life will be like as a professional dancer?

APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT

## Participant Informed Consent Form

**Title:** Dance students at a two year college: Making sense of their academic, cultural, and social world.

Dear Dance Students,

Informed consent means that research participants need to have sufficient information about the project in which they are being asked to become involved so that they have a general understanding of the research before they volunteer to participate. You are being invited to take part in personal interviews in your capacity as a dance pre-major.

**Purpose of this study:**

The purpose of this qualitative research study will be to explore how dance students understand their challenges and opportunities.

**General Information Pertaining to this Study:**

- As principal researcher in this study, I will explain this process to you prior to the interview process taking place.
- By completing this informed consent, you are volunteering to participate in this study.
- You have the ability to not participate or not volunteer in this study.
- You have the ability to not answer any or all of the interview questions.
- You have the ability to retract your participation at any time during this process.
- Please ask any and all questions pertaining to this study at any time.
- Your participation will not be disclosed to anyone.
- Your name and your institution will be masked through the use of pseudonyms.
- Must be 18 years of age to participate in study.

**Procedures:** Volunteers for this study will participate in personal interviews conducted by the researcher. It is estimated that the interview process will take no longer than 60 minutes to complete. The responses will be audio recorded and transcribed. In addition, your name and institution will not be disclosed as pseudonyms will be utilized during the entire research process.

**Location:** Personal interviews will be conducted at a mutually convenient time and location or at the college library.

**Duration of the Interviews:** The interviews are estimated to take no longer than 60 minutes. The study is scheduled to take place in the summer and fall of 2016. The estimated dates are between May and August 2016.

**Risks/Benefits:** There are no reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts involved in taking part in this study. We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your participation. The results of this study may better inform college professionals about the current status of dance students possibly including issues on retention, persistence, and graduation.

**Compensation/payment:** There is no compensation for your participation in this study. Your participation is voluntary but will positively contribute to the academy.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. All information will be handled in a strictly confidential manner, subject to the disclosure requirements of Florida Sunshine Laws, so that no one will be able to identify you when the results are recorded and reported. The personal data collected in this study will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of the respective colleges. In any report that is published or presented, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. All information is subject to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974, which is designed to protect the privacy of educational records.

**IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to participate in the study or withdraw your consent at any time during the study. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your institution or any of its representatives. IF you decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences or affecting those relationships.

**Contact Information:** Questions or concerns about this study can be addressed to the researcher: Benjamin Lopez email [benjaminlopez@bellsouth.net](mailto:benjaminlopez@bellsouth.net) 407-927-0579.

The protocol of the project was reviewed and approved by the UCF Institutional Review Board (IRB) to assure that the research is conducted in compliance with human subjects. Questions or concerns about your rights in this project may be directed to the UCF Institutional Review Board, IRB Director, Office of Research and Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826 (407-882-2276).



APPENDIX D  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
 Office of Research & Commercialization  
 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
 Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
 Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
 FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: Benjamin J. Lopez

Date: May 23, 2016

Dear Researcher:

On 05/23/2016, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
 Project Title: DANCE STUDENTS AT A TWO YEAR COLLEGE: MAKING SENSE OF THEIR ACADEMIC, CULTURAL, AND SOCIAL WORLD  
 Investigator: Benjamin J Lopez  
 IRB Number: SBE-16-12260  
 Funding Agency:  
 Grant Title:  
 Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 05/23/2016 11:11:40 AM EDT

IRB Manager

APPENDIX E  
PARTICIPANT LIST OF KEY RESPONSES

## WARDA

- Costumes
- Push yourself  
I'm good at it.
- ✓ Can't do anything else
- Dad lil skeptical
- Parents wanted college
- What can you do w/ that?
- Yes to bachelors in dance
- Competition w/ peers
- watching peer inspires her
- Happy for others
- failed many times / stressed
- doubt yourself
- they are a family
- travel
- ✓ find connections
- It's going to be hard
- ✓ I'm happy dancing
- love to do it
- open to working 2 jobs

APPENDIX F  
MASTER LIST

Key: 18x6 = 18 themes and 6 participants  
 RQ = Research Questions  
 Ppl = Number of participants stating theme

RQ	#		18 x 6
2	1	Costumes / cost	4 ppl
1	2	Love it	6 ppl
1	3	College important to parents	5 ppl
2	4	Parent or parents not happy	5 ppl
2	5	What can you do with that	4 ppl
1, 2	6	Proceed to bachelors in dance	4 ppl
2	7	Travel the world	3 ppl
2	8	Backup or double major	5 ppl
2	9	Happy for others	6 ppl
2	10	Big Family	3 ppl
2	11	Struggle all the the solid	3 ppl
2	12	Push forward	3 ppl
2	13	Competitive	6 ppl
2	14	Hard, paycheck to paycheck	4 ppl
1	15	Mean to be / college	5 ppl
1	16	Happy	3 ppl
2	17	Independent / Unlucky learn vice versa	6 ppl
2	18	Parent / responsibility	4 ppl

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