An Inward Gaze, An Outward Reflection…
to Bar(rè) the Soul:

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Declaration

I certify that, except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the contents of this thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research programme; and, any editorial work, work or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

A.W. Brian De Silva
March, 2011
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Dedication

In Memoriam

I would like to dedicate this work to the memory of my father, A.W. Jayasiri De Silva. He believed in me and in my abilities implicitly, and it is his belief that started me on the road to an academic career. His financial sacrifice in supporting me through my years at University, I will never be able to repay in my lifetime. The pain of his loss has eased, but his memory is forever etched in my mind.

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<tr>
<td>‘A’ Levels</td>
<td>Sometimes called the GCE A Levels – a national examination undertaken for entrance into university in the UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Australian Ballet. Sometimes also referred to as The Australian Ballet Company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>Artistic Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Ballet School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMP</td>
<td>Adventures in Motion Pictures – a company set up by Matthew Bourne</td>
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<tr>
<td>AO</td>
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<td>BaB</td>
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<td>BB</td>
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<tr>
<td>BR</td>
<td>Ballet Rambert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CanDoCo</td>
<td>A dance company of differently abled dancers based in London, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIT</td>
<td>Critical Incident Technique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corps de Ballet</td>
<td>A term used to describe an individual dancer’s position in a ballet company when they first join the company. It is an entry level position for those who join directly from ballet school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNB</td>
<td>Dutch National Ballet</td>
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<tr>
<td>GLF</td>
<td>Gay Liberation Front</td>
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<td>HKBC</td>
<td>The Hong Kong Ballet Company</td>
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<td>The Hong Kong Ballet Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>LFB</td>
<td>London Festival Ballet (now the English National Ballet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDT</td>
<td>Nederlands Dans Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N I</td>
<td>The research methodology called Naturalistic Inquiry, as proposed by Lincoln and Guba and employed in this study</td>
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<td>Code</td>
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<td>NTBS</td>
<td>National Theatre Ballet School (Melbourne)</td>
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<td>PAC Ballet</td>
<td>Performing Arts Centre Ballet</td>
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<td>SB</td>
<td>The Scottish Ballet</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDC</td>
<td>The Sydney Dance Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDT</td>
<td>The Singapore Dance Theatre</td>
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<tr>
<td>VCA</td>
<td>Victorian College of the Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCAST</td>
<td>Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAB</td>
<td>The Western Australian Ballet</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that, the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no steps had trodden back.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two woods diverged in a wood, and I
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Abstract

We are separate and distinct individuals physically, psychologically, and mentally, and our experiences of our lives are unique. The research documents these unique life experiences by casting a ‘verbal gaze’, thick with descriptions, on the lives of seven men. The study captures these elements through the life path trajectories of seven male dancer/choreographers.

In addition, all these men self-identify as being non-heterosexual (homosexual, sexually ambivalent, and asexual). These seven men told me their stories (social narratives) and I am using these narratives to gain insight and understanding of the social, psychological, and political conditions that impacted their lives and made them who they are today – as non-heterosexual dancers and choreographers.

The research employed the methodology of Naturalistic Inquiry to analyse the life cycle stage development of male (non-heterosexual) dancer/choreographers. Primarily, the research identifies and discusses the critical incidents (self-identified) that had an impact on the lives of these individuals (respondents) from childhood to their adult years as dancer/choreographers. For many respondents, the critical incidents were also seen as problems they needed to overcome. As part of the secondary research questions, the study goes on to identify and analyse the problems, both personal and professional, they encountered during the course of their lifetimes. The research also looked at the skills used, both innate and acquired, in attempting to resolve these problems. Finally, the research looked at the nature and consequences of the decisions they made to overcome these problems.

The major outcome of the research is to identify those elements and variables, both intrinsic (innate) and extrinsic (external), that locate (place) and contextualise their lives as dancer/choreographers in main-stream society, but also attempts to identify those elements and variables (intrinsic and/or extrinsic) that dislocate or de-contextualise their lives as non-heterosexual male dancer/choreographers in main-stream society. The study concludes with a discussion of the other possible sources and areas of research that dovetail from this current research.
CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION

What is dance? If you ask this question of any person in the street, you will probably get a myriad of different and varied answers. Their responses are likely to include ballet, salsa, tango, the waltz, foxtrot and the different types of dances with which people are familiar. They would all be correct, as this is what dance actually means to them. Different people will have differing opinions, as their individual experiences will undoubtedly be separate and distinct from any other.

Ask a balletomane – a word associated with a person who follows ballet very closely – and his/her response will focus on the different ballets they have seen, the steps used to execute the ballet, the romanticism involved and the emotions expressed by and in the dance form itself. Ask a dance critic or dance researcher the very same question and you are very likely to get such a response “can we formulate a definition comprehensive enough to cover the wide variety of activities routinely referred to as dance” (Copeland & Cohen, 1983, p. 1). Their responses will take you through a discussion of the medium, the art form, the genre, the style, its language, its notation, and of course, its criticism (Copeland & Cohen, 1983).

If you ask a philosopher about what he/she thinks about dance, they will probably lead you towards the study of aesthetics, and to be able to draw the distinction between “whether we see the object before us under concepts appropriate to art (that is, make an artistic judgement about it) or under concepts appropriate to be merely aesthetic” (McFee, 1992, p. 42). They will more likely take you through an analysis of the concepts for understanding, experiencing, and criticising dance (McFee, 1992).

All these different peoples’ concepts and understandings are correct in some way, in their assessment of what is dance, because that is the way in which they experience dance, and also the way in which they experience the quality of the dance. Dance research has gone
into the study of the quality of dance and the qualitatively different ways people experience
dance. There are numerous (phenomenographical and phenomenological) studies and a large
body of research conducted about dance. My research’s prime focus is not to add to this
already large existing body of knowledge, but rather add to the knowledge about male
dancer/choreographers.

The next logical question then is what is a dancer? Many people associate the word
dancer with women. We conjure up images of women dancing *en pointe* floating across the
stage encapsulating the elements of

Effortlessness, lightness, and fluidity of movement, which coupled with her chaste
and modest bearing made her appearance to be indeed an airy being innocent of
human lusts and desires…the beings were almost always costumed in a variant of
the Sylphide bell shaped skirt, adapted from the ball dresses of the period and
made of many layers of diaphanous muslin, which later became known by its
French slang name ‘tutu’. (Au, 2002, p. 50)

This ideal of the classical dancer being female has developed historically and was prominent
during the Nineteenth Century. The idea of the dancer has become the embodiment of all
things female, for one very simple reason, the viewer is none other than – “white, middle
class”, and predominantly “heterosexual men” (Burt, 1995, pp. 12, 17).

When you attend a performance and view a dance, what do you actually see? You see
the dancer and their body, this is an inescapable fact. Your view of the dance and the dancer
is necessarily gendered – by your own gender, and the gender of the dancer. This fact will
colour your opinion and view. This is problematic, particularly for the men in dance. If the
dancer is ideally female, then all things to do with dance are therefore deemed inherently
female. For the men in dance, the issues relating to maleness, masculinity, and therefore
masculine behaviour, are all called into question. Hence, in the latter half of the Nineteenth
Century male dancers were reduced to stage decoration, while women in travesty played the leading male roles (Au, 1988; Burt, 1995; Nash, 1997), hence, men became almost invisible.

Can we really separate the dancer from the dance, as much as we can separate the body from the dance? For me, the answer is ‘NO’. In all things relating to the body, society’s sense of morality comes into play, in addition to our biases, prejudices, belief systems, values, religious beliefs and upbringing, and traditions. But, we use the body to dance, that is the instrument, and hence, the gender of the dancer is as well inseparable from the dance. In ballet, dancers are assigned roles, and these roles are gender based and gender specific. In modern and contemporary dance, where we rarely see roles assigned by gender, is it still correct to say that the movements choreographed and danced by a male, are the same as if they were danced by a female?

We live in a gender specific society, and very few can deny that gender itself is socially constructed. It is not my desire to consider the issue of gender or sexual politics as it applies to dance. Inevitably, some issues relating to gender will have to be looked at as and when they are raised by the interview respondents. In this way, they did have an impact on the research.

The earlier discussion highlighted some of the many issues that arose in my research on dance, but more importantly, it served the purpose of distinguishing my research focus. I began with the idea of what makes a good male dancer. Historically, emphasis and focus had been on the female dancer, for the predominant viewing audience was male. Today’s viewing audience is more diverse – in other words – more modern in outlook and not predominantly white, middle class, and heterosexual male. Today’s society is not governed by these tight rigid structures, and gender identification is not defined by just being heterosexual, far from it.

So what makes a good male dancer? That will be my focus. I shall focus on male dancers who do not necessarily conform to the heterosexual model of masculinity. I shall be investigating what factors/incidences/events have had an impact on their lives, and to assess
the impact (nature and consequence) these factors/incidences/events have had on their lives. Part of this process also requires a look at issues of maleness (masculinity) and its impact on being a male dancer. My research identifies, explains and analyses the factors, incidents and/or events that have led these individuals to the point in their lives where they have self-identified as being dancer/choreographers. I believe that the more we know about the lives of these male dancer/choreographer(s), the more we will understand about who they are. The more we know about them as dancer/choreographers, the more we will understand why they dance and choreograph, or both.

Before we can have any real insight into these factors/incidences/events, we need to have a view, albeit a very brief one, of the historical role of men in dance, to the point of obscurity and invisibility in the Nineteenth Century; to their role of equal importance in today’s dance world, where in some instances, to eclipse the fame once only associated with women.

1.1 **RATIONALE**

In assessing the need for this research, it is useful to review the development of dance through the ages.

1.1.1 **The historical development of dance**

Ballet, modern and contemporary dance today “as performed on the proscenium stage of the theatre” (Au, 1988, p. 18) can trace its history back to the Seventeenth Century court of Louis XIV, the French king who founded the Académie Royale de Danse (Williamson, 1946, p. 3). Court ballets of the time, states Au (1988), looked at political themes (p. 17), personifications of “honour, grace, love, valour” (p. 19) and were the domain and for the enjoyment of noble amateurs and the royals (Williamson, 1946). It is pertinent to state the focus of dance (or any writings or research on dance at the time) was “to reinforce literary and
chivalric themes to help consolidate the power of, and to pay homage to, the King” (Au, 1988, p. 12).

In the latter half of the Seventeenth Century, ballet progressed “into a professional art” with the evolution of “technical feats that demanded a high degree of training and skill” (Au, 1988, p. 23; Williamson, 1946, p. 3). Au (1988) comments further “the audience’s perception of the dancer” also “began to alter as performing conditions changed…The proscenium stage created both physical and psychic distance between the performers and the spectators” (p. 23). Professionalism in the world of ballet, and hence dance in general had begun, as further evidenced by the establishment of the Academie Royale de Danse in 1661 (Au, 1988, p. 24).

“The Eighteenth Century was the age of brilliant dancers…and choreographers began to seek something beyond the mere display of technique” (Au, 1988, p. 29) or as Williamson puts it, “a struggle for dramatic expression as apart from mere display and technical virtuosity” (1946, p. 3). The focus of dance, the art of dancing, and its training at the time would have been on “dance instruction and establishing ‘scientific principles’ for the art” (Au, 1988, p. 30). The emphasis of dancers would have been in their ability to emulate the techniques in their display (of dance), as a demonstration of their skill(s), and, the gaze of the audiences (of the time) would have been on the dancers (usually female) and their employment of the skills or technique.

It was during the Nineteenth Century, according to Au (1988), that ballet achieved its modern identity by acquiring “many of the characteristics that are now equated with it in the public mind: the pointe technique…the bouffant skirt called the tutu, and the desire to create an illusion of weightlessness and effortlessness, and the association of the female dancer with ethereal creatures of fantasy, such as sylphs and fairies” (p. 45). It is significant that during the course of the century, emphasis, focus and gaze were firmly established on the female form such that “male dancers suffered a crushing loss of prestige” (Au, 1988, p. 45). It would be fair to state that any writings, narratives or research on dance at the time would have been
to highlight the female dancer and render the male dancer quite invisible. Au (1988) comments that this “Romantic period did not lack good male dancers…but ballets such as *Pas de Quatre* confirmed the public in its overriding adulation of the ballerina” (p. 54).

In the Twentieth Century, the world and art of ballet saw a resurgence of activity and interest particularly from the 1910s to the 1930s (Au, 1988) with the coming of the Russian Ballet or the Ballet Russes under the direction of impresario Sergei Diaghilev. They presented superlative dancers like Anna Pavlova and Vaslav Nijinsky, choreographers like Michel Fokine, Leonid Massine, Serge Lifar and George Balanchine, composers such as Stravinsky, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, costume and set designers, musicians and dances that are legendary even today (Reynolds & McCormick, 2003). With the Ballet Russes’s performances in the West, they rekindled interest in choreography (Riviere, 1913), as well as in music, in dance, and in dancers. More importantly, they made it possible for audiences to refocus their gaze from the female dancer to the form of the male dancer in Vaslav Nijinsky. Nijinsky, states Franklin (2001) was responsible for the “contentious rebirth of the male ballet dancer on the western European stage” (p. 37). The male dancer was no longer invisible!

Since the 1950s and 1960s, the world has again refocused its gaze on the male dancer, especially with the newsworthy defection of Rudolf Nureyev to the West (Watson, 1994, p. 223). He has been “singled out especially for the encouragement he had given to male dancers…the ratio of girls to boys in American ballet schools had been 50 to 1, now it was 15 to 1” (Watson, 1994, p. 379).

### 1.1.2 Writings on dance

Early writers on Ballet (and hence, dance), many of whom were performing arts critics, wrote exclusively from the point of view of the male. Noverre (1803, p. 13) in his writings used exclusively masculine nouns like he or him to describe the *maître de ballet*. In all probability, such positions were exclusively the domain of men. “In Nineteenth Century ballet…the choreographer – almost invariably a man – imposed abstract patterns on the
bodies of others (usually women). There is after all no male equivalent of the *corps de ballet*" (Copeland, 1993, p. 139). More importantly, the critics themselves were male, all of whom wrote exclusively from a very male perspective (which is hardly surprising). These very same critics, in most instances, were casting their male gaze over the female form, her costume, and her portrayal of femininity through “delicacy, grace and lightness” (Gautier, 1838, p. 436) and performances with “aerial and virginal grace” (Gautier, 1837, p. 431).

It is not surprising that with the advent of the Feminist Movement in the 1960s, Feminist writers spoke out against this “privilege of men” (Copeland, 1993, p. 139). Not only were they privileged with their gaze, but the dance form employed male dancers to “put this fully turned out woman on display” (Copeland, 1993, p. 141). Copeland (1993) adds further that the Feminists were beginning to ask, rightly so, if “sexual politics dictated that the woman be displayed and that the man do the displaying” (p. 141).

This of course gave rise to Feminist scholarship in dance, especially by female dancers and choreographers, who were “suspicious and resentful of what has become to be known as the male gaze” (Copeland, 1993, p. 142). They could justifiably cite Theophile Gautier’s dance criticism as bordering on “soft porn in its obsessive fetishing of the of the ballerina’s body parts” (Copeland, 1993, p. 145). Further criticism can also be levelled that more often than not dance perpetuates - in its training, practises and critical approaches - “patriarchal ideology, value judgements and its accompanying ready-made world view” (Goldberg, 1988, p. 8).

### 1.1.3 The research on dance(rs)

This brief discourse of the history of dance is significant for a number of reasons – it shows the development of dance from the Sixteenth Century to the current time. It also serves to show, albeit rather briefly, how dance has developed over time; but more importantly, what has been highlighted or focussed upon over time with the move from court ballet to professional ballet to *ballet d’action*, and then romantic ballet to modern dance. This course
of development has influenced, and has been influenced, by the study of dance and dance scholarship (in the writings on dance and dance criticism).

The focus of dance scholarship has evolved from the enjoyment of dance as leisure and spectacle, to that of a professional spectacle, focussing on technique. This in turn was followed by the teaching of strict dance technique, but also allowing for the showing of expression within the technique. At the start of the Twentieth Century, technique itself began to be overshadowed by what was called the total expression of the senses, which was the mainstay of modern dance as advocated by Isadora Duncan (Layson, 1983; Reynolds & McCormick, 2003). Contemporary dance(rs), since the 1950s and 1960s, have created their own technique, but in total opposition and in contravention of all that is known as ‘classical technique’.

Much of this dance scholarship has been undertaken from the dance critics and dance historians point(s) of view. In all this time of focussing on technique, or creating new techniques, little effort or time was spent looking at the (collective) lives of these dancers who lived, trained and performed the technique(s), especially the male dancers. Much has been written about male dancers, but predominantly in the form of an auto/biography (singular), but never a collective study of the lives of male dancers. There can be little or no doubt that how they lived, how they trained, and how they performed throughout their lives as dancers and choreographers is crucial to any real depth of understanding as to what it takes to be (and sustain oneself as) a dancer and/or choreographer.

It is time to start a new emphasis, focus and gaze. I believe that now is the time to refocus our attention again (in dance) on the male dancer. It is time to cast our critical eye in the form of a gaze on the male dancer, but this time from the point of view or perspective of another male. The gaze I am advocating is not a visual gaze on the body of the dancer, its myriad forms, or the way it is employed in dance. To do so would only serve the purpose of objectifying the male physique or the male form in dance. This would in turn only perpetuate
sexual stereotypes, and exacerbate the problems cited earlier, and create further problems particularly from a psycho-sexual and socio-political point of view.

I have had very little experience by way of professional dance, except as a member of the viewing (gazing) audience. Dancers place a strong emphasis on technique and training. Choreographers on the other hand tend to focus on expression, artistry and creativity. I am proposing that we cast another type of gaze on the male dancer. I choose to call it a narrative gaze; one that relies heavily on thick description (narrating what is seen and experienced) which is key in Naturalistic Inquiry (NI). I call it a narrative gaze because we are not seeing or viewing them. Instead, we are getting a vision in our minds eye about male dancers through their narratives, descriptions, and the retelling of their experiences, so we can obtain a verbal description of what their lives were and are like, and what it is like to be them, as dancers and choreographers. What I am hoping to gain through this narrative gaze is a deeper insight, understanding, and appreciation of what it is and what it takes to be a male dancer/choreographer in this postmodern time that we live in today.

1.1.4 The research and the community

In describing this research, it becomes important to contextualise it, and cite it within the larger community.

1.1.4.1 The research and the country as community

In citing the importance of dance criticism, research, and scholarship, in relation to Australia (the wider community), it would be hard to convincingly draw any direct relationship or directly quantifiable benefit. The only exception would be to say that dance, in its myriad forms, contributes immensely to our cultural wealth and heritage, as it helps us express our ethnicity within our cultural identity. The research will help us understand a little more about our male dance community who are assets that make up a part of our cultural wealth.
1.1.4.2 The research and the dance community

My research does not have as its purpose a specific discussion or analysis of dance in general, a particular dance technique or style, a particular dance performance, or the philosophy (aesthetics) of dance per se. It does not deal with these issues directly. It will however deal with these issues separately in so far as how they impact (if at all) on the lives of the dancers and choreographers who will be the focus of this study. It provides something of value for the dance community specifically as it offers a very personal insight into the lives of male dancers and choreographers who are very much a part of the lifeblood and essence of the dance community.

1.1.4.3 The research and the dance education community

Research and scholarship in dance not only helps us to understand dance, but more importantly it helps the dance education community to value dance as an important and valuable asset worthy of maintaining and passing on to the next generation of dancers. The teaching of dance today will be the link to establishing, nurturing, and ensuring that we have a rich cultural future. I see the research as having a lot to contribute to the world of the teaching of dance.

This contribution will not be in the arena of technique, movement, or repertoire. Its greatest value will be in being able to assist male dancers and choreographers in the expression of their creativity and artistry. If we have a good understanding of what experiences male dancers and choreographers go through to become who they are creatively and artistically; would it not be wise then in their dance education to assist them in their journeys by managing their experiences or helping them learn how to manage these experiences? All forms of professions have their own form of apprenticeships, why not in dance? The understanding and subsequent management of these important/critical events, it is hoped, will go a long way towards assisting future male artists in their dance training, their profession, their dancing and their choreography.
1.2 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

Dance research and scholarship has always had its main focus on dance and dance performance. Dance, as we know it today, can trace its history to Sixteenth Century court dances in the French Court of Louis XIV (Au, 1988; Au, 2002; Williamson, 1946). The emphasis on dance itself has never ceased, and interest in its creation has never waned. For almost over four centuries, writings on dance, dance criticism, and dance scholarship have made ‘technique’ its central focus.

We (the viewing audience), as a direct consequence of this fact, have come to equate the true and real value of dance first, in terms of the mastery (or otherwise) of the technique, followed a close second by glorious music to which the display of technique can achieve its true zenith, with decorative enhancements (costumes and sets), and romantic story lines to serve purely as accessories and adornment. To the person in the street, this is what dance is all about. For some (in the dance world), the perpetuation of this stereotype is integral to keeping its current audience, and also key for building and maintaining a future viewing and attending audience.

The recommendations of the Commonwealth Government’s Major Performing Arts Inquiry – Securing the Future (1999), addresses some of these issues, albeit from a predominantly economic and quantitative focus; but dance as a performing art, may not continue to thrive (or even exist) if we do not do something now to change the existing knowledge and skills base. As educators and researchers, it is imperative for us to increase this knowledge base, and to include all forms of dance. It is also our responsibility to ensure the dissemination of this knowledge and information base by performing, teaching, educating, informing and/or training the population to challenge their pre-conceived notions and accept new ideas of, and about, dance.

With my skills and abilities as a researcher, I can conduct research on dancers and choreographers and ask them about their lives as dancer/choreographers. I am asking these
dancers and/or choreographers to reflect critically on their lives, and to identify the critical events that have arisen and influenced their lives. This reflection requires them to ascertain what these events were/are, why and how these events were/are critical, and how they have helped shaped their lives as dancers and choreographers. It is through their recounting and retelling of these experiences that we will get some idea of what it is to be a dancer and/or choreographer, as they have been.

My responsibility as the researcher will be to collect this information, analyse them, and to provide my findings in the form of data and information, which will be presented in the results and discussion chapters (Chapters 4 to 6). It is my informed belief and considered opinion that I can best achieve what I have set out to accomplish (as listed above) by using the methodology of Naturalistic Inquiry as advocated by Lincoln and Guba (1985), which will be elucidated in chapter two. An elucidation of the issues of phenomenology, phenomenography, (which were considered as possible methodologies and were eliminated) and NI will be undertaken in greater detail in the next chapter.

My research is not directly about education, let alone educational policy, it is not about stakeholders either, and it is not about evaluations of any sort. It is essentially a study of a special group of people (non-heterosexual males – as clarified in Section 1.2.2) and how they have lived their lives to get to the level of achievement they have accomplished today.

1.2.1 Location of the programme

The research is located in Australia, in Melbourne primarily, with some interviews carried out in New Zealand.

1.2.2 Scope of the programme

The programme of research is in the main, conducted and analysed in Australia. However, a number of respondents were sought and interviewed in New Zealand. I interviewed seven respondents in total, five from Australia and another two from New
Zealand. Respondents were also sought in New Zealand for a number of pertinent reasons. In terms of gaining access, the two respondents from New Zealand (Wellington) already agreed, in principle, to be part of my study. One of the two respondents was an ex-principal dancer with the Royal New Zealand Ballet. He was trained at Royal Ballet School in London, and also performed with the Western Australian Ballet. The other is also a dancer/choreographer in New Zealand. He trained at the Royal Ballet School, Bejart School in Belgium, and a number of different companies in Europe. His most recent position was that of Director of the New Zealand School of Dance. I had access to the latter respondent through my friendships in dance circles in New Zealand.

In Australia, I interviewed three individuals from The Australian Ballet (AB), as I had access to interview these dancers through Mr Colin Peasley, the Manager for Education at AB. He was my liaison at the AB, and I sought his opinion and assistance for my choice of respondents. He gave me two names of individuals to contact. These two are from outside the circles of the AB. One is a teacher at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA), School of Dance, while the other is retired, but who was a founding member of the AB.

Of the seven respondents, four identified as ballet dancers, and trained in the classical technique. The other three respondents would be classified and/or self-identified as contemporary dancers. Half of the respondents started dance at an early age (about eight years old) while the other half started in their early teens, from around fifteen years of age. Their collective interests in dance began quite differently, some through their involvement with gymnastics, horse riding, physical education, and folk dancing. Of the seven, four have very strong backgrounds and extensive histories in terms of choreographing. They (all seven) are all dancers and choreographers in their own right.

Of the seven dancers interviewed, five self-identified as being homosexual. Many of them did have heterosexual relationships in their early teens to early twenties, but are now living homosexual lives, hence, their self-identification as such. Of the five, three are in
relationships with other men. The other two are still single. Of the remaining two, one self identifies as being sexually ambivalent, and has been so since his accident. The final respondent identifies himself as being asexual. It is my belief that his age and upbringing makes him identify himself as such. A further in depth discussion about the sample will be carried out in the next chapter and again in the discussion (Chapter 6).

As part of the methodology of Naturalistic Inquiry (NI), as advocated by Lincoln and Guba (1985) member checks are essential. Member checks were undertaken with the respondents as a “means of establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 315). I sent copies of transcripts of interviews to respondents for contextual checking and review. These activities assist with “prolonged engagement” required of the methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 303).

I used a surrogate auditor to look at the findings obtained from and after the analysis. She was involved in an “inquiry audit” which attempts to “examine the process of the inquiry” and also “the product - the data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 317-318).

1.2.3 Objectives of the research

The objectives of the research are:

1. To identify the critical events that had an impact on the lives of these male dancers and/or choreographers.

2. To determine, understand, and appreciate what made these events critical for the individuals, as they experienced them.

3. To determine the nature of the decisions that had to be made by these individuals as a direct consequence of their experience with these critical events and to assess what impact those decisions have had in their careers as dancer/choreographers.

4. To analyse the commonalities (or differences) in these critical events and the consequent decisions that followed as a direct result of these events.
1.2.4 Research questions

The primary research question for this study is:

1. What are the critical events that impacted the lives of these male dancers and/or choreographers, and why are these events perceived as being critical by the individuals who directly experienced them?

The secondary research questions are:

1. What are the problems (personal and professional) these male dancers and/or choreographers faced while in pursuit of their individual careers?
2. What are the skills they possessed, and/or acquired, to assist them in the resolution of these problems (as in 1 above), to help them arrive at decision(s) to undertake and implement?
3. What are the decisions they made, as a direct consequence of their experiences with the critical incidents, in the way they lived their lives as dancers and/or choreographers?

1.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I identified at the main issues related to this research. I analysed the historical development of dance and how male dancers fared throughout the ages. I also assessed dance research and where its focus has been in the past. I attempted to distinguish my research from the wealth of knowledge already in existence. I endeavoured to make and formulate a simple explanation as to my reason(s) for selecting the methodology of Naturalistic Inquiry (NI).

In Chapter two, I look at the different methodologies I could have used for this research. I explain in greater detail why NI was my choice and go on to elucidate some of the key issues and characteristics of this methodology. I also discuss how I went about conducting this research and spend a little time talking about the model(s) I used in the formulation of the questions used for the interviews. Finally, I present a summary of how the
analyses of the interviews were carried out, and how the results of the analysis were presented in Chapters Four and Five.

In writing the literature review in chapter three, I looked at the different sources and research that informed my study. The range of research looked at what is dance and why people dance, to looking at issues that affect men in particular and then, their impact on men in dance. I also look at two specific research studies undertaken in both Australia and the United States that were linked to my research.

Chapter Four and Chapter Five present the results of the analysis carried out on the transcripts of the interviews. These chapters are of considerable length due to the sheer size and volume of raw data available. In chapter six, the discussion section, I attempt to draw relationships between the literature reviewed and the results obtained from the analyses, and make an attempt at developing some grounded theory that arises from the analysis of the results.

In the final chapter, Chapter Seven, I look at the conclusions drawn from the current research. I did consider other avenues of possible research that dovetail from this current research.
What I’ve produced is truly hideous. It is harsh, and all in all ugly and unsuccessful. And yet, because I was tackling a real difficulty with it, it may pave the way for the future.

Vincent Van Gogh, 1888

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

I introduced the nature of my research and its focus in the previous chapter. I presented an overview of the historical development of dance and the subsequent dance research that has taken place. In doing that I outlined the importance of my research, and discussed the location and scope of the research, where and when this research was cited and conducted respectively. I ended the chapter by identifying the primary and secondary research questions of this research.

2.1 WHY METHODOLOGY NEXT?

Most research theses have as part of their structure, in terms of presentation, the Literature Review following the Introduction. I intend to employ a different outlook and approach in this research. To begin with, the introductory chapter presented the what, where, when, and why of the research and it is logical, practical, and rational to want to continue and discuss the final element of how. It would be logical to follow with the how, given the other sections have been dealt with already.

Looking at the primary and secondary research questions in this research, it is apparent I do not intend to employ a quantitative research approach. I seek to identify qualitatively what critical events impacted on the lives of these respondents as they negotiated the life cycle stages of their lives. I am also looking qualitatively into the nature of the decisions they made, what skills they used to make these decisions, and what impact these decisions had on their lives and careers. A quantitative research methodology would not help me achieve the results I am seeking to find very successfully. This being the case, and for reasons of logic, the flow of information and rationality, I choose to circumvent custom and conventional wisdom to address the issues of methodology next.
Methodology is defined as “the choices we make about the cases to study, methods of data gathering, forms of data analysis etc., in planning and executing a research study” (Silverman, 2001, p. 306). The study of the methodology that underpins the research will be elucidated below, together with how the research was undertaken.

2.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Mason (2002) states qualitative research:

Means rejecting the idea of a priori strategic and design decisions, or that such decisions can and should be made only at the beginning of the research process. This is because qualitative research is characteristically exploratory, fluid and flexible, data driven and context sensitive and also given that it would be both inimical and impossible to write an entire advance blueprint. (p. 24)

Qualitative research has always been identified, through its point of departure from quantitative research, as “soft, flexible, subjective, political, case study, speculative and grounded” in contrast to the latter which has been perceived as “hard, fixed, objective, value free, survey, hypothesis testing and abstract” (Halfpenny, 1979, p. 799). Fielding and Fielding (1986) make the point that “researchers who generalise from a sample survey to a larger population ignore the possible disparity between the discourse of actors about some topical issue and the way they respond to questions in a formal context” (p. 21).

My choice of the use of qualitative research is based on my preferences for qualitative data – understood simply as the analysis of words and images, naturally occurring data – observation rather than experiment, “meanings rather than behaviour” (Hammersley, 1992, p. 165), and a preference for inductive, hypothesis generating research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The perspective I take is that, humans are “social actors, who use words and images to tell stories, write narratives and biographies to give understanding and interpretations of their individual lives, to highlight their ideas, perceptions and motivations so as to explain their individual and hence collective lives as multiple realities” (Mason, 2002, p. 15). The
epistemological position in this research is that “the rules which decide whether and how social phenomena can be known, and how knowledge can be demonstrated” (Mason, 2002, p. 16) will be highlighted and discussed later in this chapter, with the selection of an appropriate methodology. The data sources are those commonly used in qualitative research, interviews with various individuals, who are part of “particular communities and institutions, the setting used is material and sensory, with a reliance on texts from many sources and at times using material and visual objects and artefacts” (Mason, 2002, p. 52). In many instances, I asked the respondents’ biographical information and/or life history stories. This is vital and as people are “social actors, to active social agents, and a sense that the narrative of a life, a biography or an autobiography, conveys the essence of this in meaningful ways. People, and therefore their life stories, which can be told verbally, or in documentary or in visual ways – are the data sources” (Mason, 2002, p. 56).

Bresler and Stake (1992) comment that “qualitative researchers have a great interest in the uniqueness of the individual case, the variety of perceptions of that case, and the different intentionalities of the actors who populate the case” (p. 79). Bresler and Stake add further that qualitative research has characteristics which are as follows:

- It is holistic and its contents are well studied. It is empirical, field oriented, the field being the natural settings of the case. It is descriptive where the data take the form of words and graphics rather than numbers. It is interpretive. Its researchers rely on intuition with many important criteria not specified. It is empathic. Some researchers emphasize working from bottom up. When done well, its observations and immediate interpretation are validated. (p. 79)

This is reflected in my research and is the nature of my research. Walker and Evers (1999), in defence of qualitative methods, state

- The genuinely and distinctively human dimension cannot be captured by statistical generalisations and causal laws. Knowledge of human affairs is
irreducibly subjective. It must grasp the meaning of actions, the uniqueness of events, and the individuality of persons. From this perspective it is easy to see the quantitative tradition as an intrusive, even alien and antihuman, approach to the study of education. (p. 44)

Walker and Evers further assert that “in addition to being unable to capture the necessary relation between the human mind and social reality, critical theorists maintain that the quantitative (or empirical analytic) tradition cannot capture the essential role of values in that kind of knowledge needed to improve the human condition” (1999, p. 45).

2.3 PHENOMENOLOGY

Fraleigh (1987) states

Phenomenology is first of all a method that, as its point of beginning, attempts to view experience from the inside rather than at a stance…Consequently, phenomenology often takes the form of the first-person description. As it takes the perspective of consciousness, the style of phenomenology shifts liberally between the rhetorical and inclusive we, and the experiential but also inclusive I. (p. xiv)

Fraleigh (1987) makes the case that both “dancer and the audience experience dance through its lived attributes – its kinaesthetic and existential character…dance is the art that intentionally isolates and reveals the aesthetic qualities of the human body of action and its vital life” (Fraleigh, 1987, p. xiii). As dance is both kinaesthetic and existential, to understand dance requires a phenomenological approach. (This issue of phenomenology in dance will be discussed in detail in the literature review - Chapter Three, Section 3.2). Phenomenology in its essence is seen as the best methodology for the study of the dance itself and the dancer’s experience of the dance. This may explain why phenomenology is popular within the dance community and why there are a wide variety of different forms of the phenomenological method.
“Phenomenology is an approach to the study of human beings and all things natural...it is also a philosophy of co-experience. It attempts to understand how meaning is made and acquired with human existence” and it is “the practice of studying the world through the perceptions of individuals...the phenomena is collected, may be compared, although it is usually just reported, and is not analysed in the methods of quantitative research” (Holden, 1997, p. 6). Phenomenology allows us to gain insight, understanding, and appreciation that “cultural objects and collectively practiced ways of understanding” can provide “social, historical evidence of existence and knowledge” (Holden, 1997, p. 16).

Given the characteristics of phenomenological research, I chose not to employ a phenomenological approach to my research. Looking at the primary and secondary research questions of the study, I can clearly see how this methodology did not provide a suitable fit for my research. In my study, I am looking to determine what types of events affected the respondents, what decisions they took as a result of these events, and what skills they possessed which supported them in making these meaningful decisions. It is clearly not about the feelings or sensations of the events themselves, or about the examination of human values from a psychological or philosophical view point. As a consequence, phenomenology was ruled out in favour of an allied field of study called phenomenography.

2.4 PHENOMENOGRAPHY

What distinguishes phenomenography from phenomenology, states Marton (1996), is that it “is focussed on the ways of experiencing different phenomenon, ways of seeing them, knowing about them and having skills related to them’ and “the variation and the architecture of this variation, in terms of the different aspects which define the phenomena” (para. 2). He adds further that the two “differ as to purpose”, and the phenomenographist would ask something like: “What are the critical aspects of ways of experiencing the world that make people able to handle it in more or less efficient ways?” and go on to ask questions that may deal with the “qualitatively different ways of experiencing” something of importance.
Phenomenology focuses on experience of the phenomenon, whereas phenomenography has as its focus the qualitatively different ways you can experience the phenomenon. Hence, they are related and phenomenography is sometimes called “a child of the phenomenology family” (Marton, 1996, para. 4).

Marton (1994a) identifies it as the “empirical study of the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which we experience, conceptualise, understand, perceive, apprehend, etc. various phenomena in and aspects of the world around us (p. 1). This understanding, states Marton (1994c), is defined “as the experiential relations between an individual and a phenomenon...changes in a person’s understanding constitute the most important form of human learning” (para. 1). Phenomenography, as described by Marton (1988), is that which:

Investigates the qualitatively different ways in which people experience or think about various phenomena. Phenomenography is more interested in the content of thinking than is traditional psychology...Phenomenographers do not make statements about the world at large as such but about people’s conceptions of the world. (pp. 99-100)

Svensson (1994) states the term phenomenography, first used by Marton in 1981, was used to refer to research already carried out and also to refer to a suggested research programme” and what was common about the programmes was the “aim to describe peoples conceptions” and went even further on to suggesting the “comparison and systemisation of descriptions of conceptions” (p. 10). Phenomenographic research undertakes to look at the “variations in the way which people experience the phenomena they meet in the world around them” and the area of specific interest with this methodology lies in the way people learn where “learning is viewed as being a change in the way of experiencing the world” (Booth, 1994, p. 3).

Phenomenography, as a mode of enquiry, characterises “how some particular phenomena are perceived by people of different ages, historical periods, cultures or sub
cultures” and by doing this we can “help uncover conditions that facilitate the transition from one way of thinking to a qualitatively ‘better’ perception of reality” (Marton, 1988, p. 99).

Marton also states that “we do not try to describe things as they are, nor do we discuss whether or not things can be described ‘as they are’ rather we try to characterise how things appear to people...therefore descriptions of perception and experience have to be made in terms of their content ... phenomenography provides descriptions that are relational, experiential, content oriented, and qualitative” (1988, p. 100).

Hasselgren and Beach (1994), state such analysis is looking at:

Different statements from the same perspectives and the same statement from different perspectives, juxtaposing the outcomes, bringing first one aspect of variation into focus, then another... and to also explore the extent to which the statements which are categorised have been subject to production relations which may potentially at least transform their original subjective meaning they might have carried as well. (p. 5)

Phenomenography was initially perceived as the methodology of choice for this research. At first glance, it seemed perfectly suitable for the research I intended to undertake. I realised there were a number of inherently fundamental issues that I had to be resolve.

To begin with, the methodology of phenomenography looks at the qualitatively different ways in which different people understand and experience phenomena (Marton, 1994a). The phenomena studied by Marton and his team focussed on how students learned (Marton, 1994b). The final outcome of their research was not only the different ways students’ understood what they read, but also what their conceptions of what they read meant in their learning of the text (Marton, 1994b), and in their process of learning the subject.

However, this is not the nature of my research. My research attempts to look at the way different people live their individually experienced lives. In doing so, my research
attempts to identify, analyse and describe the critical events, problems, skills and abilities affecting these respondents during the course of their lives.

Both phenomenography and phenomenology were thus eliminated as possible methodological choices for my research. It was time then to refocus my thoughts and ideas, so I decided to look at Naturalistic Inquiry (NI), henceforth referred to as NI.

2.5 NATURALISTIC INQUIRY

Naturalistic inquiry (NI) is difficult to describe, it has roots in both studies of “ethnography and phenomenology” (Tesch, 1990, p. 19). Tesch (1990) asserts that the term was first used in psychology by Willems and Rausch in 1969, in sociology by Denzin in 1970, and was introduced into education as “an approach which has considerable promise” (p. 19). This considerable promise was “for evaluation particularly” (Guba, 1978, p. 1). This method introduced and advocated by Egon Guba in 1978 was a method particularly for educational evaluation, and was contrasted with conventional inquiry (Guba, 1978, p. 11).

Tesch (1990) states further the development of the methodology, although in 1978 still referred to as a method, was later viewed more broadly as a method for getting at the truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). By 1985, it had become “the naturalistic paradigm” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 36), while in 1978, naturalistic inquiry was contrasted with “conventional inquiry (which ordinarily is experimental inquiry)” (Guba, 1978, p. 11). In 1985, it was contrasted with positivism and viewed as “a particular post-positivist paradigm” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 36).

Tesch (1990) states that “if we compare naturalistic inquiry as a way of doing research with other types of qualitative research, it stands out through its emphasis on the human as instrument where humans are the major form of data collection device” (p. 20). Tesch (1990) defined (in summary) the different methodologies by highlighting their purposes, and to also indirectly highlight their inherent similarities and differences:
1. Naturalistic inquiry – “a non-positivist approach to research in which the researcher is the instrument and the focus is on understanding the meaning the people under study give to their experiences” (p. 23).

2. Phenomenography – “describing conceptually perceived qualities of a phenomenon through contextual analysis” (p. 24), and

3. Phenomenological research – “illuminating inter-subjective human experiences by describing the essence of the subjective experience” (p. 24).

In the definition of naturalistic inquiry above, I had finally an appropriate fit between methodology and the research I undertook. In arriving at my methodology of choice, I was faced with another dilemma.

I believe that in order to gain greater legitimacy for their purported methodology, it was incumbent upon Guba and Lincoln to show how their method was effective in undertaking educational evaluation. NI was set up to challenge the other methods of educational evaluation, in a field which by the late 1970s and 1980s had been legitimised by fields of endeavour which included educational anthropology and ethnography.

Lincoln and Guba provide detailed instructions on how to use their methodology. It is common in each of their books to find a chapter justifying their use of the method, a chapter on the nature of the inquiry, how to undertake the research process, how to interview and use documents, and finally how to implement the method and recommendations (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In 1981, to create greater legitimacy and acceptance for their method, they chose Effective Evaluation as a title, given that educational research at the time focussed on educational evaluation. This work was “later viewed more broadly as a method at getting at the truth” (Tesch, 1990, p. 19).

In their 1985 work, states Tesch (1990), they focussed on the naturalist paradigm (p. 19) and hence their work was entitled Naturalistic Inquiry. They devote the first three chapters of that book to developing and arguing in favour of the naturalistic paradigm.
(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is important, if not critical, to note that it is this piece of work which begins the identification process and arguments in favour of NI as a legitimate mode of qualitative enquiry, hence it is named as such. It is in this work where the methodology “is contrasted with positivism and viewed as a particular post-positivist paradigm” (Tesch, 1990, p. 19). The word paradigm, meaning a view of the world, thereby implying that they were presenting or offering a new view or philosophy of qualitative research.

In 1989, however the authors reverted back to the idea and concept of educational evaluation again in naming their book Fourth Generation Evaluation. I can only surmise that with their previous book, a large degree of legitimacy had been obtained for their methodology, and hence they could refocus their research yet again into the arena of educational evaluation, their main area of interest.

2.5.1 Selecting a method to use

It is clear for the kind of research I envisaged, set out by the primary and secondary objectives of the research (in Section 1.2.3), the research method of choice is without any doubt qualitative. I have already ruled out phenomenology and phenomenography in the earlier sections (2.3 and 2.4). I then turned my attention to looking at the chronological development of NI as a methodology of choice. The dilemma that arises at this stage is to distinguish and choose between the two methodologies as advocated by Lincoln and Guba, in their 1985 work titled Naturalistic Inquiry, and that of their 1989 work called Fourth Generation Evaluation.

NI, as advocated by Lincoln and Guba in their work of 1985, was my final choice of a methodology. There were a number of reasons for this choice. To begin with, it is only with their work in 1985 that their version of the Naturalist paradigm was identified and advocated. This was a paradigm shift from that previously employed in conventional enquiry. In all of their other works, their main focus was always on educational evaluation or on educational research, whilst their work in 1985 focussed solely on the methodology itself.
Finally, what made my decision even easier to make were the following facts about the methodology of *Fourth Generation Evaluation* as advocated by Guba and Lincoln (1989):

1. Their emphasis is on educational evaluations which “are commissioned by some party or parties, typically called clients or sponsors, who are legally and fiscally in a position to contract for such service” (p. 188).
2. They further assert that at the heart of this evaluation method is the identification of the stakeholders “as persons or groups that are put at some risk by the evaluation that is persons or groups that hold a stake” (p. 201).
3. The evaluation projects, as envisioned by their methodology in 1989, are focussed on educational evaluation on an extensive scale which has outcomes which need to be negotiated with the relevant stakeholders.

My research does not have, as any of its objectives, educational evaluation of any kind or an analysis and evaluation for any particular client entity per se. What it is about is the application of a methodology which has its roots in education and educational evaluation, to identify, describe, and assess what impact certain events have had on the lives of the group of people I am researching. It is with this thought and focus in mind that I eliminated the methodology advocated by *Fourth Generation Evaluation* as my methodology of choice.

### 2.5.2 The methodology of choice

The methodology of choice is that of NI as advocated by Lincoln and Guba (1985). In this methodology, the key is the naturalist paradigm. A paradigm is a “system of ideas” that “either give us some judgement about the nature of reality, or a reason why we must be content with knowing something less than the nature of reality…a systematic set of beliefs together with their accompanying methods” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 15) which can often be referred to as a world view. “If a new paradigm of thought or belief is emerging, it is necessary to construct a parallel new paradigm of inquiry” and Lincoln and Guba advocated for NI” (p. 16).
The five axioms (basic beliefs) of the naturalistic paradigm according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) are:

1. The “nature of reality” is that they are “multiple, constructed, and holistic”.
2. The “relationship of the knower to known” is one where the “knower and known are interactive, inseparable”.
3. Only “time and context bound working hypotheses are possible” in terms of the “possibility of generalisation”.
4. All entities are “in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping”, so it is “impossible to distinguish causes from effects”, and finally
5. The entire “inquiry is value bound” (p. 37).

To make these five axioms more operational in terms of the conduct of research, the authors describe what they call the “fourteen characteristics of operational naturalistic inquiry” where “these characteristics can be justified in two ways: by their logical dependence on the axioms that undergrid the paradigm, and by their coherence and interdependence” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 39).

It is crucial to gain an understanding of these fourteen characteristics in order to appreciate what is required of undertaking research using this methodology. Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that these “characteristics display a synergism such that once one is selected, the others more or less follow” (p. 39). These characteristics, as advocated by Lincoln and Guba (1985) are as follows:

1. A Naturalist chooses to “carry out research in a natural setting…because of the belief that context is crucial in deciding whether or not a finding may have meaning in some other context as well” (p. 39).
2. The human instrument is the “primary data gathering instrument…and because all instruments are value based and interact with local values but only the human is in a position to identify and take into account (to some extent) those resulting biases” (pp. 39-40).
3. The Naturalist “argues for the legitimisation of tacit (intuitive, felt) knowledge in addition to propositional knowledge (knowledge expressed in language form) because often the nuances of the multiple realities can only be appreciated in this way” (p. 40).

4. Qualitative methods are selected over quantitative because “they are more adaptable to dealing with multiple realities” and also because they are “more sensitive to and adaptable to the mutually shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered” (p. 40).

5. Purposive sampling is advocated because it “increases the scope and range of data exposed” and can be “pursued in ways that will maximise the investigator’s ability to devise grounded theory that takes adequate account of local conditions, local mutual shapings, and local values (for possible transferability)” (p. 40). It is interesting to note that the last three characteristics are all related to the first axiom of realities being multiple, constructed, and holistic.

   The next three characteristics: inductive data analysis, grounded theory, and emergent design are also related to the axiom of multiple realities.

6. Naturalists prefer inductive data analysis because the process is more likely to:

   “Identify the multiple realities to be found in those data…make the investigator – respondent interaction explicit, recognisable and accountable…and…identify the mutually shaping influences that interact” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40). This characteristic is also linked to the axiom of the relationship of the knower to the known.

7. Naturalists “prefer to have the guiding substantive theory emerge from the data because no a priori theory could possibly encompass the multiple realities that are likely to be encountered; because seeing is believing and naturalists wishes to enter into his transactions with respondents as neutrally as possible” (p. 41).

8. Following this, they also state that in terms of emergent design, the naturalists elect “to allow the research design to emerge (flow, cascade, unfold) rather than to construct it pre-
ordinately (a priori)…because what emerges as a function of the interaction between the inquirer and the phenomenon is largely unpredictable in advance” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 41).

9. Negotiated outcomes tie and bring together two axioms. Naturalists “prefer to negotiate meanings and interpretations with the human sources…because inquiry outcomes depend on the nature and quality of the interaction between the knower and the known” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 41).

10. The case study reporting mode is preferred with this methodology because: “it is more adaptable to demonstrating the investigators interaction with the site”, as it provides the basis for both “generalisations and transferability to other sites (thick description), it is suited to demonstrating the variety of mutually shaping influences present and it can picture the value positions of the investigator” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 42). This characteristic brings together axioms (the basic beliefs) number four and five listed earlier.

11. The data is interpreted “idiographically (in terms of the particulars of the case) rather than nomothetically (in terms of law like generalisation)” and “interpretations depend on particular investigator-respondent interactions, contextual factors and local mutually shaping factors influencing one another” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 42).

12. It is because no attempt is made to make broad generalisations naturalists tend to be “tentative about making broad application of the findings…because the findings are to some extent dependent upon the particular interaction between the investigator and respondents that may not be duplicated elsewhere” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 42)

13. The penultimate characteristic is that of focus determined boundaries whereby the researcher is “likely to set boundaries to the inquiry on the basis of the emergent focus (problems for research, evaluands for evaluation, and policy options for policy analysis) because that permits the multiple realities to define the focus” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 42).
14. As their ultimate characteristic, Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that the Naturalist is “likely to find the conventional trustworthiness criteria (internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity) inconsistent with the axioms and procedures of naturalistic inquiry” and they are “likely to define new criteria and devise operational procedures for applying them”, with the “substitute criteria called credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability…to affirm the trustworthiness of the naturalistic approaches” (p. 43). The last four characteristics bring together axioms number three to five. It is interesting to note that these fourteen characteristics are embedded in the flow of NI, which forms the basis for identifying what constitutes a naturalistic study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) further advocate that the fourteen characteristics are justifiable for “naturalistic inquiry” because of “coherence and/or mutual reinforcement among the characteristics” (p. 43), implying their interconnectedness. In applying a “naturalistic perspective”, the naturalist is “forced into a natural setting” because “he or she cannot specify what is important to control or even study” (p. 43). This lack of specificity means “he or she must fall back on the open ended adaptive instrument: the human being” employing a “purposeful sampling” technique involving “observation, interview, documentary analysis and the like” to arrive at an output in the form of a case study “which lends itself well to the full description that will be required to encompass all the facets and make possible understanding on the part of a reader” (pp. 43-44).

It is imperative at this stage to present an overview of the criteria for establishing trustworthiness in a research project using the naturalistic approach. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that “the basic issue in relation to trustworthiness is simple: How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, or worth taking account of?” (p. 290). Conventional inquirers have found it useful to look at the features like truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality, through which they have evolved the criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and
objectivity” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 292). As Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocated for the naturalist paradigm, they argued in favour of criteria more appropriate to the naturalist paradigm.

In order to deal with the axiom of multiple realities, to demonstrate truth value, Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocate that “the naturalist must show that he or she has represented those multiple realities adequately” and so “the operational word is credible” (p. 296). In terms of applicability, “the criterion for external validity…is a trade off situation with internal validity” the “responsibility of the original investigator ends in providing sufficient descriptive data to make such similarity judgements possible” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 298) or what we call transferability.

In terms of establishing reliability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that “the naturalists sees reliability as part of a larger set of factors that are associated with observed changes”, the substitute criterion is “dependability…which takes into account both factors of instability and factors of phenomenal or design induced change” (p. 299). In terms of objectivity, the naturalist prefers the qualitative definition of objectivity where “there is a reference to the quality of the testimony or the report or the (putative) evidence, and so I call this the ‘qualitative’ sense” (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 300). The issue here, states Lincoln and Guba, is “no longer the investigators characteristics but the characteristics of the data: Are they or are they not confirmable?” (1985, p. 300). The last criterion is therefore that of confirmability. The four terms credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability are the new equivalents for the Naturalist researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 300)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) add there are additional activities that can help the naturalist to meet the test of trustworthiness, they suggest three activities namely, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that prolonged engagement is for “learning the culture” (p. 301), to “detect and take into account distortions” (p. 302), and finally “to provide the investigator an opportunity to build trust”
Persistent observation “is to identify those characteristics that are most relevant” (p. 304), and with triangulation assisting with “improving the credibility” of the findings (p. 305). In addition, Lincoln and Guba (1985) also recommend peer debriefing, referential adequacy, negative case analysis, and member checks.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider transferability can be resolved “by thick description”, and with dependability through the use of “overlap methods, stepwise replication, and an inquiry audit” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 316-317). Additionally, they assert “the best technique for establishing confirmability is the confirmability audit” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 319). Two other techniques (triangulation, and the keeping of a reflexive journal) were also suggested by Guba (1981) for confirmability, which can be seen “to dovetail with the audit process” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 319). Finally, I arrived at a methodology of choice for which to undertake the research as I have envisaged it.

The next section identifies and discusses issues that are not directly related to NI as a methodology, but its use does have methodological implications for the research. The issues relate to the use of critical incident technique, the use of critical reflection, and finally the use of social narratives provided by the respondents, which in my opinion constitute a form of (auto)biography.

2.6 CRITICAL REFLECTION and (AUTO)BIOGRAPHY

In this research study, I asked the respondents to reflect critically on their lives, from their childhood to their present lives (at the time of their interviews). I added another dimension which overlaid this, by asking them to identify the critical events in their lives, and the decisions they had to make as a result of these critical events, to arrive at the point in time where they self-identified as non-heterosexual dancer/choreographers. By eliciting these facts from the respondents, I was entering into the associated fields of critical event studies, critical reflection (on the part of the respondents) and also the issues associated with (auto)biography,
as their accounting and retelling of their lives amount to the oral telling of their own life story. I will address these issues in the next section.

2.6.1 The use of critical events

The systematic use of the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) was developed by John C. Flanagan who reported its use in 1954 as a method of studying activity (Brookfield, 1991; Cohen & Smith, 1976; Flanagan, 1954). Flanagan (1954) defined it as “a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behaviour...and for collecting observed incidents having special significance” (p. 327). Hughes (2007) states CIT is a “well proven qualitative research approach that offers a step-by-step approach to collecting and analysing information about human activities and their significance to the people involved. It is capable of yielding rich contextualised data that reflect real-life experiences” (p. 49). This technique “obtains and records specific behaviours from those who are in the best position to make the observations and evaluations”, and by doing so, are able to “formulate what constitutes the critical requirements of the activity(s) in question” (Cohen & Smith, 1976, p. 120).

The critical incident model is seen as a way of arranging events in sequence, beginning with “those that led up to and immediately preceded a critical event, to those that specify the consequence of certain interventions” (Cohen & Smith, 1976, p. 123). This list of critical behaviours, states Cohen and Smith, provides a basis for making inferences as to what is required in terms of aptitude, training and other characteristics (1976). Its use and application has been associated with the field of psychology where such critical requirements are used in the fields of “training, job design, motivation, leadership, counselling, and psychotherapy” (Cohen & Smith, 1976, p. 120).

Hughes (2007) adds that CIT involves “the study of critical incidents – or significant instances of a specific activity – as experienced or observed by the research participants. Detailed analysis of critical incidents enables researchers to identify similarities, differences or patterns and to seek insight into how and why people engage in the activity” (p. 49).
Chell (2004) believes “CIT has in common with participation observation and the unstructured interview” (p. 47) the fact that they are all examples of qualitative techniques that allow the researcher to get closer to the subject (Bryman, 1989). Chell (2004) also says “CIT is overt in that the subject is aware of being interviewed. Once assurances have been given of confidentiality and anonymity, the interviewee relaxes and is able to recount his or her own story” (p. 47). This is precisely what I undertook with this study. I used personal interviews with the assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, but I have used the concepts inherent in this technique and applied it in a slightly different manner. I asked the respondents to identify the critical events in their lives, I also asked them to explain why these events were critical, and what life decisions they needed to make as a consequence of these events. In this application, I am still looking at the criticalness of these events, and their impact on their lives.

Chell and Baines (1998) say CIT has been used to identify the context of emotionally laden critical events, while Cope and Watts (2000) state the identification of critical events is the point from which experiential learning takes place. It is therefore not surprising that critical incidents have also been used in research in education states Brookfield (1991), in relation to “exploring learner’s assumptions, by getting learners to write descriptions about significant events in their lives” (p. 179). A critical incident report provides, states Brookfield (1991), graphic written descriptions of particular happenings that “readers are able to visualise quite clearly the event which they describe” (p. 179). From an educational point of view, it is believed by Brookfield (1991) that he can presume “the learners assumptions” which are embedded in, and can be inferred from, their specific descriptions of particular events, which in turn, also allows the educator an insight into another person’s frame of reference, the structures of their understanding, and the “interpretive filters” they may use, so as to replicate the way these events are “experienced and understood” (p. 180).
The important thing to note about critical incident reporting is that they highlight “particular, concrete, and contextually specific information about a person’s experience” (Brookfield, 1991, p. 180). Their value, for what Brookfield calls, transformative learning lies in the fact that they are written accounts by people about their actions in their own lives, in other words their “existential realities”; and also because they are a primary data source which gives insights into the learners “assumptive worlds” using the learners own words and expressions (1991, p. 180). It is important in this method to ensure that “learners express themselves directly in their own authentic language” (Brookfield, 1991, p. 185). These descriptions provided by the respondents, “goes a long way towards informing the researcher about the respondent’s choice of significant events”, what that choice says about their value systems, and finally, “what assumptions underlie the specific actions they took in the incidents they had described” (Brookfield, 1991, p. 188).

2.6.2 The use of critical reflection

This process of getting learners or respondents to identify critical events in their lives also involves a large component of what is called critical reflection. This is critical reflection because I am asking my respondents to reflect back, very critically on their lives to determine what critical events in their lives were. This concept of critical reflection is also used in educational research.

Hatton and Smith (1995) identified four key issues relating to reflection and these relate to thought processes about action, the time frame within which this reflection takes place, whether it is by its very nature problem centred, and finally whether a “person’s conscious reflection takes into account the wider historic, cultural and political values and beliefs” (p. 3).

Reflection, states Hatton and Smith (1995), usually involves “looking back at some action usually some time after it has taken place” (p. 4), and this can sometimes be “on action” and sometimes “in action” (p. 3). This “construction and re construction of
professional experience”, though reflection can sometimes result in tacit knowledge, so vital for any person’s personal and professional life (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 5). This reflection, therefore, involves an intuitive component of engaging in “reflective conversation” with oneself, and also opens it up for the possibility of reframing (p. 5).

Evidence from groups applying reflection in education have found that students with a distinct “internal orientation” tended to be more reflective, and felt it really important to structure situations, ask questions about what is happening and why this is happening (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 11). More importantly, it is these students who find it quite easy to identify what they want to learn, have sound interpersonal relationships, “exhibit personal security and self-efficacy” and show a great concern for the impact they may have on their student’s learning (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 11). In this, it shows how important and powerful a tool reflection can be.

Critical reflection involves “framing and reframing” practical problems to which solutions are being sought and determined (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 3). Critical reflection, like reflection is, in some ways, “no more than just constructive self-criticism of one’s actions with a view to improvement” (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 4), but is also one that involves giving reasons for decisions or events which take into account “the broader, historical, social and political contexts” (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 14). Critical reflection in their study, stated Hatton and Smith (1995), demonstrated an awareness that both actions and events are located in and by reference to multiple perspectives, and also influenced by “multiple historical and socio-political contexts” (p. 24).

Mezirow (1990) looks at critical reflection from a slightly different but yet allied view as that presented by Hatton and Smith. Mezirow states that critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions upon which our beliefs are built, and in doing so, we aim to “make sense of our experience(s) by interpreting it, and this interpretation guides our decision

Reflection, states Mezirow (1990), is a “higher order mental process in which individuals engage in to explore their experiences in order to obtain new understanding and appreciation of that experience” (p. 5). In asking others to doing this reflecting, we are asking them to “rationally examine the assumptions they have used to justify their sense of convictions”, states Mezirow (1990, p. 5). This rational examination helps us to understand the process of how a person defines and solves their problems, which then becomes the focus for understanding the learning involved. One inherent problems with the processes defined above is that they are never free of bias(es).

Mezirow (1991) goes on to further re-define critical reflection, as what he claims to be, referred to as “challenging the validity of presuppositions in prior learning” (p. 12). He said we become critically reflective by “challenging the established definition of a problem being addressed”, by attempting to find a “new metaphor” that re-orients problem solving efforts in a more effective way (Mezirow, 1991, p. 12).

Adulthood is the perfect time for reassessing the assumptions of our formative years that could have provided us with distorted views of reality, and we can use this time to transform these anomalies by reflecting on our “meaning schemes” (Mezirow, 1990, p.13). These anomalies or “distortions of meanings” could have been brought about by the nature and use of knowledge (epistemic distortions), taking for granted belief systems pertaining to power and social relationships (socio-cultural distortions), and those that affect our ability to confront, to feel sexual or take risks (psychic distortions) (Mezirow, 1990, p. 17). Adulthood claims Mezirow is a “time to regain these lost functions” (1990, p. 17). The critical reflections I have asked the respondents to undertake become the perfect forum for the understanding of the belief system(s) they have grown up with, and provide an opportunity for them to identify any anomalies and deal with them as adults.
2.6.3 The use of (auto)biography

I asked all of the interview respondents to talk about the critical events in their lives, from childhood to adulthood. Although, these are oral and social narratives, they are to an extent a form of autobiography, they are just not written. I am asking the respondents to re-create their life histories through the answering of the questions posed to them. “Revealing our own personal narratives (as painful as they may be)” states Risner (2002), also helps with “reading them in conversation with the dominant stories, or metanarratives our culture tells us” because “these accounts are told inside these larger social narratives” (p. 67). In other words, I am looking at the experiences of these many varied individuals, “as one of many in a collective pursuing deeper understanding” (Risner, 2002, p. 67). I have also looked at and used biographical sources for information. With this in mind I elucidate the issues relating to biographies and autobiographies, henceforth referred to as “(auto) biography”.

Much research has been carried out in the fields of (auto)biography as a methodology (Denzin, 1989; Erben, 1996; Scott & Usher, 1999), as a source of valuable information (Usher, 1998), and also as a useful tool for education and learning (Dominicé, 1990; Parker, 1998; Usher, 1998).

Denzin (1989) states that the biographical method is “the studied use and collection of life documents...these documents will include autobiographies, biographies, diaries, letters, obituaries, life histories, life stories, personal experience stories, oral histories, and personal histories” (p. 7). Its purpose, states Erben (1996) is to explore and analyse individual lives, and the relationship therein between “social forces and personal character” (p. 159). This method forces an individual to undergo an experience that is both “reflective as well as naturalistic”, because as people experience their lives, they are aware of doing so and hence are self conscious, and this self consciousness, as it proceeds through their lived experiences becomes “constitutive of self formation” (Erben, 1996, p. 159).
Erb en (1996) states “the intentions of individuals” relative to “the contexts and settings in which they find themselves” at the time, are the “guide and goals that constitute life history” (p. 164). As human beings, we not only recount stories, states Erben, but we are “story telling creatures, and it is through the hearing of these stories, that our own narrative selves engage with our culture” (1996, p. 165).

Scott and Usher (1999) add that when faced with “reconstructions from participants of their own fragmented lives”, it is important to note that these reconstructions are made “coherent by an act of methodological introspection” previously agreed upon by the participant and researcher, where such agreements are negotiated and renegotiated during the collection of the data and also involve a “shifting in the power relations” between the two of them as the outcome is realised (p. 117). The participant’s life, states Scott and Usher (1999) is continuously made and remade by the participant in the present time, but because the narratives are “embedded in history, the life is always undergoing transformation” (p. 118).

The resulting interpreted accounts, state Scott and Usher (1999), can therefore be “only one of many interpretations which could be made by the writer, and at some point in time; the series of interpretations being made would have been closed off during the course of the process of research” (p. 119). It is not surprising therefore that Erben (1996) sometimes refer to the biographical method is increasingly referred to as the “auto/biographical method” (p. 160).

Usher (1998) also stated that the autobiography not only involves remembering the past but also involves the recreating the past, the self and the past are constructed and reconstructed, and through this process, the self is “recreated, discovered and reinvented” (p. 20). Usher (1998) goes on to state this most eloquently:

How we understand ourselves is not just a matter of here and now present understandings of the past, but a product of how we understood ourselves in the past and our anticipation of future possibilities, how we will be in the future. We can never understand our lives purely in terms of a givenness of the present or a
fixed thing like past. Our self identification is an unfolding into the future, which is enfolded in a past, itself unfolding into the future. (p. 22)

Silin (1999) presents the issue of (auto)biography from the point of view of a gay male teacher, and he states “stories change over time and are transformed by times”, adding further he states that “if we constitute ourselves through the stories we tell, we are also constituted by the communities available to hear them” and this telling of stories “promotes social mobilisation as well as personal catharsis” (p. 99). Silin points out that we live in a culture “that thrives on intimate personal narratives” evidenced by “talk shows, bookstore shelves and self help groups” awash with stories of people who recount and retell their struggles in life with “addictions, destructive relationships and the effects of childhood abuse” (1999, p. 102). The importance of where we locate ourselves “within identity politics makes the question of how to speak out about rather than for others more pressing and paralysing every day” and this is more so for gay people in general (Silin, 1999, p. 105).

In his research, Gordon (1999) looked at the relationship between adolescence, narrative, and Queer Theory, and states that “turning back to adolescence is a seemingly mandatory gesture in any narrative of gay or lesbian identity” (p. 1), but argues that “retrospective narrativisation of adolescence is more tenacious as a grounding postulate than coming out stories in terms of their emancipatory value” (p. 3). Adolescence, he states is always understood to become “apparent in hindsight, it is structured throughout by a foreshadowed denouement, which is the subject’s arrival at adulthood” (Gordon, 1999, p. 3). Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) states:

Every given person, just as he or she was necessarily assignable to a male or female gender, was…considered necessarily assignable as well to a homo- or a hetero-sexuality, a binarised identity that was full of implications, however confusing, for even the least sexual aspects of personal existence. (p. 2)
From the statement above, we can see that getting people to recount and retell their stories, goes a really long way towards helping people understand their cultural and political identity, but also provides a mechanism from which we can learn how people build and learn their own sexual and adult identity.

Parker (1998) and Dominicé (1990) both undertook their research looking at the use of biographies and autobiographies as useful tools for learning and education. Parker (1998) focussed on the autobiography of the learning of PhD students. This (auto)biography of learning looks at the narrating of an edited version of one life which focuses “especially upon what it means to each individual to learn” (Parker, 1998, p. 118). In getting these students to describe their learning autobiographically, Parker (1998) feels makes it more than “just accumulating information and interpreting data” (p. 123), but far more significantly, as an “educative exercise which promotes the development in the moral reasoning of the teacher” (Erben, 1996, p. 159). Parker also adds that this study she undertook spent some time looking at and listening to “divergent voices which disrupt our norms” and hence, as a group of educators, acknowledge the “different and the difficult” (1998, p. 128).

Dominicé (1990) used what she calls educational biography, a version of life history, whereby a group reflect about their learning “based on the interpretation by adults of their own reconstructed learning processes” (p. 194). Dominicé (1990) explains that the practice of what she calls educational biography was quite unique in a number of different ways namely: participants had to focus on how they became themselves and how they learned what they knew “through the various contexts, life stages and people who were relevant to their education” (p. 197), and participants were taken as “authors of their interpretations since they are the sculptors of their own life histories” (p. 198). The “variety of languages and the plurality of meanings” that resulted added to the learning experience of life histories which added “richness to this subjective experience” (Dominicé, 1990, p. 200). What the students learned was that learning is a process and is “a result of the formation and transformation of
knowledge, culture, and/or value systems”, learning is also about social interaction whereby the students learned to respect other norms and beliefs, and that education is not just about schooling but also about social experiences (Dominicé, 1990, p. 201).

Edwards and Usher (2000) assert that globalisation has a way of resulting in our “questioning of the self and self-identity” (p. 100) and “this self-identity becomes conditional upon our decisions about our lifestyles” (p. 101). In doing so, state Edwards and Usher (2000), we are faced with a society where people are being “reflexive and self-questioning” unstoppably (p. 102) is resulting in anxiety in the workplace, where people are looking for “continuous improvement” (p. 104). It is incumbent therefore, upon the institutions of learning and education to provide people with these skills set either by including them in their curriculum or alternatively by designing courses for those who have left university and in the job market already (Edwards & Usher, 2000). Therefore, the process of education and their pedagogical practises must change to meet this changed demand in society by granting greater legitimacy to this form of practice of critical reflection by requiring academics “to themselves become reflexive” and “subjecting their practices to critical self-scrutiny” (Edwards & Usher, 2000, p. 110). From this discussion, we see researchers advocating for the legitimacy and efficacy of the use of (auto)biography in gaining an understanding of individuals and of themselves, which explains its use in the research study.

2.7 The ‘HOW’ and ‘WHY’ of the RESEARCH

Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocated for the use of a particular model in designing a naturalistic inquiry. The mode I selected and the process I used for this research was based on their model. To begin with, I will discuss how I went about conducting this research, and why I went about the research in this way. Obviously, the choice of the methodology is going to have a far reaching and significant influence and effect on how I went about conducting the research. In setting out and explaining how the research process developed and how I undertook the research, I am also presenting an appreciation and discussion of why it was
conducted in this particular way, which in turn goes a long way towards fulfilling the requirements of the methodology of choice. This section is about the design of the research, which will include the plan, structure, and strategy of investigation with the express purpose of obtaining answers to the research questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 221).

### 2.7.1 Selecting a research focus

In determining the focus of my research, I relied on a number of differing and distinct sources of information. I initially intended to extend the research undertaken for my Masters degree, but the lack of access to the relevant individuals and organisation(s) made it almost impossible to proceed. I then had to look to other sources for inspiration and focus. It did come in the form of a film *Billy Elliot*, which chronicles the life of a young adolescent boy growing up in a Welsh mining town, struggling to find his creative voice and self by ensuring his entrée into the world of dance – ballet, by auditioning and being accepted into the Royal Ballet Junior School (Brenman & Finn, 2000).

As a direct result of this film, I chose to focus my research on the lives of male dancer/choreographers. Again through film, this time the works of Polish Director Krzysztof Kieslowski’s trilogy of films titled *Three Colours: Blue, Three Colours: White* and *Three Colours: Red*, I was presented and confronted with the concept of the interconnectedness of our perceived individual and separate lives (Acquarello, 1997, pp. 5-7). In these films, people’s lives collide and intersect on a daily basis: at a local convenience store, at the train station, or even on a ferry boat. Each of their individual lives appear on the surface to be so separate and distinct, yet, they intersect and interact on a daily basis, albeit at times rather subconsciously.

I began to develop my ideas from there, and saw the purpose of my research as an attempt to look at the interconnectedness and connective tissue that make our lives so different, and yet so similar. We all start our lives similarly through birth, but, from then on we begin to take different paths, which for some will involve crossing, intersecting, running
parallel or tangentially or to even circumscribe each other. What really connect us are the experiences in our lives – the similarities, and/or the differences. I use the analogy of a road map of our lives. I am attempting to research seven different road maps, of seven separate and individual male dancer/choreographers (the respondents) – investigating their road maps and their journeys through their lives. What I am investigating is how they navigate, what they use to navigate and traverse the landscape of their lives.

What is intuitive (tacit knowledge) is these respondents had separate and individual starting points: childhood, training, life experiences, life decisions, and entirely individual approaches to making these decisions. It is these lives that I am researching, and in doing so, I am hoping to determine the different road maps used by these respondents to navigate their lives to the point where they self-identify as non-heterosexual dancer/choreographers.

In researching this topic, I undertook a wide review of the available existing literature. This review is the subject of focus in the next chapter. However, key pieces of research will be highlighted here for the important reason that they were key works that informed the research I undertook. These works ranged in terms of their area of focus. Three research studies were from the area of psychology, which dealt with specific areas of gender and sexuality (Siegel & Lowe, 1995), male dancers (Earl, 1988) and sexual orientation in dance (Bailey & Oberschneider, 1997). Two additional works were from the area of dance and dance history (Burt, 1994; Burt, 1995) and finally, one from the field of youth and sexual orientation (Savin-Williams, 1998).

These were important research studies because they not only informed the direction of the research, but they also afforded critical insights into areas of developmental psychology (Earl, 1988). They focussed on the dance world in particular (Burt, 1994; Burt, 1995; Bailey & Oberschneider, 1997) and they also looked at the issues facing gay men in their development from childhood, through adolescence, and into adulthood (Savin-Williams, 1998; Siegel & Lowe, 1995) which more importantly formed the basis for most of the
questions used during the interviews I conducted. In carrying out these activities, I was able to delimit and set the boundaries of the research, which in the words of Lincoln and Guba (1985) helps define “the proper territory of the inquiry” (p. 227). The research works mentioned above, will be considered in greater detail in Chapter Three.

### 2.7.2 Seeking whom to interview

In identifying particular individuals to interview, henceforth referred to as respondents, I was faced with the dual issues of gaining access and who particularly to interview, that is, the sample itself. I shall begin by explaining how I gained access to the respondents I interviewed.

I lived in Wellington, New Zealand, for twelve years where I was actively involved in the performing arts world both as participant and observer. As a consequence of this, I made friends with a number of people who were actively involved in the dance world. As a result of these friendships, I met many performers and choreographers in dance. I also spent a lot of time immersing myself in all form of the performing arts, especially in dance. I spoke to two people about my research, and they expressed interest and agreed in principle to be part of the research. One was a choreographer of some renown in Wellington, and the other was a principal dancer with a local dance company. Since my resettlement to Melbourne in 1996, I was still heavily involved with the performing arts world, but only as a member of the viewing audience. I attended performances of the AB season in Melbourne, the Melbourne International Festival, and as many performances as I could when I travelled overseas. Contextually, I was still heavily involved and engaged with dance, in an attempt to keep myself immersed in the dance world.

In terms of interviewing respondents in Australia, gaining access was an issue, so I sought the assistance of a gatekeeper, as advocated by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 253). This gatekeeper came in the form of the Education Manager at AB. He was one of the original members of the AB and his long involvement with AB meant he had knowledge and
awareness of the ‘Who’s Who’ in the world of dance in Australia. He was of tremendous assistance when I was undertaking my Master’s Research, and was responsible for my gaining access to the respondents I used for that piece of research. He had worked with me before, and I had managed that relationship well to ensure his assistance for future research, and I believed I had built some trust with him already. He was, of course, very forthcoming when I spoke to him about whom particularly to interview. He was responsible for my gaining access to and using these informants for my research, as stated by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 258). From New Zealand, I only managed to interview two people. There would have been more respondents from New Zealand, but the individuals originally earmarked for interviewing were unable to do so mostly for health reasons, conflicts with performance schedules, and other prior commitments. This was made even harder by my only being able to fly over to New Zealand at specific times of the year. Altogether, I interviewed seven respondents for this research, five from Melbourne and two from New Zealand.

2.7.2.1 The sample

In total, I interviewed seven male dancer/choreographers from Australia and New Zealand. I specifically chose to interview male dancer/choreographers only, as the focus of my research is non-heterosexual males. I interviewed two respondents from New Zealand. Of the five respondents domiciled in Melbourne, one was originally from New Zealand but came here in his early teens to study at a dance school in Melbourne, and has since remained in Australia.

2.7.2.2 The sample groups

I will now focus this discussion more on the two distinct groups within the sample. Each group of dancers from Australia and from New Zealand, although similar in some ways, also had unique characteristics differentiating them.

The two respondents interviewed in New Zealand, were at the time of the interviews, domiciled in Wellington, and in Nelson. Both have their roots in the United Kingdom and
both attended the Royal Ballet Upper School. They also share one other feature in common; they both had at one time danced with the Scottish Ballet. Both respondents were at the time of their interviews, in their late 30s to early 40s.

One of the respondents (Respondent One) at the height of his dancing career was a Principal Dancer with the Royal New Zealand Ballet (RNZB) and his skill and strength was with ballet. He was born and raised in Ireland, in County Cork. At the time of the interviews, this respondent had left a performing career to pursue a degree in education, but was still teaching classical technique at a local dance school in Nelson. This respondent had danced with the Scottish Ballet (SB), Western Australia Ballet (WAB) and the Royal New Zealand Ballet (RNZB).

The other respondent (Respondent Two) at the time of the interviews was the Director of the New Zealand School of Dance (NZSD). His roots go back to Newcastle in the United Kingdom where he was raised in a theatrical family. Although he was classically trained and danced ballet for most of his life, he did at some time study Contemporary Technique at London Contemporary, Rambert School of Ballet, and Maurice Bejart's school MUDRA in Brussels. He danced with the Scottish Ballet (SB), Les Grands Ballets Canadiens (LGBC) and the London City Ballet (LCB).

Respondent Two started and gained some fame for his choreography very early in his dancing career, but made the switch over to management by assuming Assistant Artistic and Artistic Directorship early in his career. He was the Artistic Director of the HKBC and Director of Dance at South Africa’s NAPAC Dance Company.

He also returned to academic study by completing his masters, then to teach dance, and finally to Directorship of a Dance School in New Zealand. He was the only respondent who made many life changing decisions based on the socio-political context existing at the time and place where he was working.
The Melbourne based sample comprised five men. This group of men were varied not only in their ages, but also in terms of their dancing and choreographing careers. Of the five, only three were dancing professionally, two with AB and the other with his own Dance Company. Of the two others remaining in the Melbourne sample, one was a classical dance teacher, while the other was officially retired from both dance and the world of theatre.

Respondent Three and Respondent Five, at the time of the interviews were dancing professionally with the Australian Ballet. Both men were in their late 20s to early 30s at the time. Respondent Three was a Soloist with the Ballet while the other, Respondent Five, was a member of the corps de ballet. Respondent Three would rise to the rank of Senior Artist with the ballet and also became a Resident Choreographer with the ballet in later years. Prior to joining the Australian Ballet, Respondent Five had danced for two years with the Queensland Ballet. He was later promoted to coryphée but has since left the ballet to join another local company based in Melbourne.

Respondent Three, at the time of the interviews, had some success with choreographing for the Australian Ballet and overseas companies too, while respondent Five had only done some choreographic workshops before and at the time (of the interviews) was about to embark on a choreographic venture with the Singapore Dance Theatre (SDT). Both respondents danced in the classical genre, but their choreographic pieces tended towards the modern, rather than pure classical technique. At the time of the interviews, Respondent Three had spent a year dancing in Europe with the Basel Ballet (BaB) before returning to the AB, and had also completed a Graduate Diploma in Arts and Entertainment Management at Deakin University.

When I interviewed Respondent Six he was in his mid 50s. He had a career as a dancer, choreographer, and teacher. He had wide and critical acclaim for his choreographic works in dance and also in opera. He has taught both classical and contemporary dance techniques. Although he began his training in classical dance, he studied modern dance and
composition in NYC at the Cunningham Studios and also at Julliard School of Dance. He taught for over 10 years at ABS, but at the time of my interviews, he was teaching at the VCA.

Respondent Four was unique in a number of ways. To begin with, at the time of the interviews he was in his early 70s and fully entrenched in retirement. He was a Founding Member of the AB and joined the company as a Soloist. He danced for many years as a member of the Borovansky Ballet (BB), the precursor to AB. He also danced overseas at the London Palladium, and with the Marquis de Cuevas Ballet, before returning home to Australia in the early 1960s. He had a long association with AB prior to his retirement, and had won wide acclaim for his lead role as the Lyrebird for Sir Robert Helpmann’s ballet *The Display*. After retiring from AB, he worked for a time in the management and administration of film and theatre venues. His association with BB and the early years of AB with its founding Artistic Director was also the subject of his autobiography published in Australia.

The final member of this sample in Melbourne, Respondent Seven, was the most distinctive of all the members I interviewed for this research study. At the time of the interview, he was twenty six years of age, and had already suffered a life threatening car accident which left him a quadriplegic. He overcame this physical disability to become a differently abled dancer with his own dance company. He had come a long way to re-establish his career as a dancer, which was taken from him at the time of the accident, to establishing his own and new reputation as a distinctly modern dancer /choreographer.

At the time of his accident, when he was only twenty years of age, he was a dancer with the State Theatre Ballet Company in South Africa. He had attended VCASS, and later the Australian Ballet School, and after graduating from ABS, he headed off to South Africa. Since that time, he has danced with Infinity Dance Company in NYC, and also started his own company in Melbourne. During the course of our interviews, he was offered a job and was heading off to London to dance with CanDo Dance Company (CanDoCo), a differently
abled dance company based in London. He is still with the company in London today. He considers himself to be dancer, choreographer, and teacher. As the youngest person interviewed, he also had the most illuminating insights to offer about dancing and choreographing not just as an individual but also as a differently abled person. He was very serious about changing the world’s perception of dance and dancers.

Although not necessarily by design, this sample of seven male dancer/choreographers covers the range of dance vocations and careers. This sample covers men who are comfortable with, and have worked with the genre of both classical and contemporary technique. In terms of dancing, the range of coverage includes dancers in positions from *corps de ballet* to Principal dancers. In terms of choreographing, I managed to interview those just beginning their choreographic careers to those who have had major successes with their choreographing careers. I was also able to interview those who have taught both the classical and contemporary technique at various dance schools in Australia and New Zealand. In terms of managing dance companies, I was privileged to have interviewed the Artistic Director of overseas dance companies, and a Director of a dance school. In this I feel that this sample of respondents I interviewed will provide great insights into the world of dance.

### 2.7.2.3 The sampling technique

Lincoln and Guba (1985) used the term “instrumentation” and “the instrument of choice in naturalistic inquiry is the human” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 236). In this research I was using the “human-as-instrument” as advocated by the naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 198). I chose to interview seven respondents for this research. The sample of people I chose, or the sampling undertaken, was carried out with a particular purpose in mind, as “all sampling is done with some purpose in mind” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 199), hence, the term purposive sampling, as advocated by Patton (1980). I used a combination of “maximum variations sampling” (Patton, 1990, p. 172): which allows the inclusion of as much information as possible, with all its implications and constructions so as to be able to
“detail the many specifics that give the context its flavour” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 201), and “snowball sampling” (Patton, 1990, p. 176), whereby I get the respondents to identify others whom they consider to be worthy of seeking information from, and “they in turn identify others”, as advocated in the methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 233).

### 2.7.3 Seeking the information

In this section, I am not referring to the interview process, but it is more about the actual interview questions that were used to seek the information. In conducting a naturalistic inquiry, say Lincoln and Guba, I need to look at “determining different phases of the inquiry” (p. 235). The authors (Lincoln & Guba) advocate for the use of at least three phases, where the first phase looks at obtaining “an orientation and overview” (p. 235), the second phase looks at a more focussed and “in depth exploration of the events themselves” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 235), with the final phase being what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call “member checks” (p. 236).

The first phase was purely exploratory in nature, to get an overview of the respondents and the events that influenced and impacted their lives. So, in this phase the questions are of a very general nature and extremely “open ended” with a view to obtaining “sufficient information to get some handle on what is important enough to follow up in detail” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 235). In terms of the formulating of questions for this phase, I formulated a number of questions around the research of Siegel and Lowe (1995), Burt (1994), and that of Savin-Williams (1998). To formulate these opening questions, I also relied on my own (tacit) knowledge of dance and dancers, which I had glimpsed from the lives of those I knew as friends and acquaintances in New Zealand. These questions, as shown in Appendix Four, were part of the first phase of interviews. It took some respondents over a period of two days to respond to these questions.

Phase Two was more of a “focussed exploration” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 235) and hence relied on more probing questions specifically about the respondent’s sexual orientation,
what effects it had on their choice of profession, and finally, how they developed their ego and selves during the course of their life stage/cycle of development from childhood to adulthood. These questions had to be more specific and probing in nature in order to get at the information I was seeking. I used the works of Bailey and Oberschneider (1997) and Earl (1988) specifically to formulate and help guide the questions used in this phase. The questions used in this phase of the interview are listed in Appendix Four. The list of questions in the phase was much larger than the first, which in some instances, took almost three different days of interviewing to solicit the information.

For most of the respondents, the period of interviewing took at least five days, but for some of the respondents, these were spread over a period of almost a year, particularly for those in New Zealand. This was the result of my time availability, which did not make it possible to fly frequently and specifically for that purpose. However, this fact did help to ensure the fulfilment of the criteria of prolonged engagement and allowed for some persistent observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The number of interviews did also go a long way towards helping to build and maintaining trust. For the respondents I knew personally, this was never an issue, but for the others, the frequency and number of meetings did help me gain their trust. At the end of the interviews, I did feel that I got to know all of them better.

2.7.4 Securing safety and anonymity

Ethically, every researcher has to ensure safety and anonymity for their respondents who provided what amounts to personal information about their lives. In order to ensure this, “fully informed consent” becomes essential (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 254). For all the respondents, I got them to sign a consent form to acknowledge that I did get their consent before I proceeded with the interview. This form included all relevant information like my name, address, and telephone number, a statement of the purpose of my enquiry, and of course a statement about their giving me consent to allow for participation in the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These consent forms were duly signed to acknowledge their having
read and agreed to the terms as stated in the consent form (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A copy of the ethics clearance is in Appendix Two. Included with this form is a statement about the guarantee of confidentiality, and assurances of consultation and negotiation about the information in the event of publication.

An introduction letter was sent to the respondents before any meeting was scheduled to explain the nature of my research and what I was trying to determine (Please refer to Appendix One for a copy of this letter). I believed this contributed towards initially building some trust and interest on the part of the respondent. Again, this is in keeping with the requirement of NI (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the first meeting, I introduced myself and the research, and then I went through the contents of the consent form. I felt it necessary to do this as a trust building exercise. I also allowed some time for questions and clarification before actually proceeding with the interview proper.

2.7.5 Securing the information – at the interviews

Prior to arriving at any interview, there was some preparatory work to do. I usually called the respondents the day before the interview to confirm the time and venue for the interview. I also prepared for the interview by annotating on the audio tape itself: the date, time, and venue of the interview. I also noted which respondent it was, and also make a recording of these details on the tape to check for verification, sound quality, and volume. Upon arrival at the interview, I spent some time talking to the respondents about the nature of the interview and the nature of my research, to put them at ease and into the context of what I was researching. This tends to involve a fairly general discussion so as to avoid leading their responses or to add any unnecessary bias.

While I was setting up for the taping, I got the respondents to write a list of critical events that had impacted their lives. I gave no indication as to what I define as critical and left it up to them to tell me why they considered these events as critical. While they were
writing these events down, I checked for issues like volume control, that the external microphone was set up properly, and in a position to catch the conversations suitably. The data collection method I employed was that of the “unstructured interview” which is in keeping with methodology of NI (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 269). The source of data collection I employed was that of taping the interview through the use of a tape recorder. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that this source has many advantages: it is, they say, an “unimpeachable data source assuring completeness” because it allows me to go back over the interview later to validate and confirm what was said by the respondent themselves (p. 271). Before I started recording, I informed the respondents that if at any time they wished to stop the taping, they could just ask for me to stop or depress the pause button on the recorder. This I felt gave them the assurance of their control over the process, hence a safety valve for them.

I usually began the interview with very general questions, which then got more specific as the interview continued. While the respondents were giving their responses, I made handwritten notes as to what was said. The handwritten notes, state Lincoln and Guba, force the interviewer to listen carefully to what was being said, to make comments, to extend questions if needed and make comments on paper for further review or to return to later (1985, p. 272).

There was a specific purpose for getting each of the respondents to write down a list of critical events, as this would start the process of getting the respondents to use memory recall and reflect back on their lives. The respondents would be relying on their memories for creating the list, and when I went through the list with them again at a later time, this would also assist in building up some repetition and redundancies for verification purposes. This method of discussion also afforded the respondents the ability “to move back and forth in time” to enable their retelling and the reconstructing of their personal past (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 272).
I also made observations of these respondents during the interviews, making special notes (in my reflexive journal) of the times when they did feel comfortable or uncomfortable, when answering particular questions. I made note of the nonverbal cues that occurred as and when they happened. Bailey (1978) states this participant observation provides a number of unique advantages: it allows the researcher to discern ongoing behaviour as it occurs and to make notes about the features of the behaviour as it occurs, and if the observation is being carried out over a period of time, it affords the researcher a more intimate and informal relationship with those he is observing.

This participant observation was particularly significant when I asked questions that were of a very personal nature. These particularly related to the respondents talking about their sexuality, and also those that required them to identify their sexual orientation. For particular people, I had to be very sensitive as to how I approached the issue. I had to be sure that they trusted me enough, before I approached this question. Hence, these questions were not scheduled in the first interview. I used observation again at a later date, when I was invited to attend a daily technique class being conducted by a visiting dancer from the Royal Danish Ballet. This observation is included as Appendix Three.

I was aware that I had built in some repetition and redundancies into the questions I asked of the respondents. I did this deliberately. By asking questions in different ways and at different times to secure essentially the same information was to all intents and purposes for checking and verifying the data and information being related to me, which was away of establishing the “trustworthiness” of the data so key in this methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 289).

The actual time I took to undertake the interviews varied from individual to individual. For the respondents in New Zealand, the interviews took place over two time periods, one spanning over a period of a year. The interviews undertaken in Melbourne did not require such a long period of time between interviews, so they were scheduled at times to meet the
performance schedules of the respondents themselves. At the longest, they were scheduled over a period of two weeks. For most of the respondents, there were five interviews in total.

In keeping with the concept of a natural setting, most of the interviews took place in the respondents’ place of work, or at their homes. There was one instance where the respondent preferred to have the interview at my residence, for comfort and privacy reasons.

2.7.6 Presenting the information

All the interviews were audio taped. There were thirty five tapes in total. I handed over the transcribing of all the tapes to a professional transcriber. As a consequence, all the transcriptions were done verbatim. I informed the transcriber as to the issue of confidentiality, and also made sure to instruct her to do it all verbatim, that is, as it is said on tape. My transcriber informed me that she would leave things she could not hear or understand by indicating it with asterisks. As a result, after the transcriptions were completed, I had to review all the tapes again manually so as to identify typographical errors, errors of omissions, and outright mistakes. I sometimes had to refer to my handwritten notes to confirm or verify particular statements made, and the context in which it was made at the time of the recording. By undertaking to do all of this, I was provided with an added advantage of being close to the subject of the interviews, and also providing me with the context of the interviews and the responses. In other words, I was made aware of my data. A final step so necessary in building trustworthiness is sending each respondent a copy of the transcription for validation and contextual checking. Any changes required will be negotiated between the respondent(s) and me.

2.7.7 Building and establishing trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a key issue when undertaking research using NI. It is essential for naturalists to take steps to demonstrate the “trustworthiness of the inquiry” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 281). I had to ensure that in my research I provided for this issue as well. In
addition to taking down notes during the interviews, I also made field notes in which I annotated what I found during the course of the interviews, and also what needed to be reviewed or clarified at the next interview session. I wrote informal notes about the activities as and when I was undertaking them. I also kept a reflexive journal where I kept all my ideas and thoughts relating to this research as and when the occurred, especially after reading a piece of research writing that pertained directly to the research at hand.

Triangulation was yet another issue that I had to be aware of during the course of this research. I used the triangulation method of different sources. I constantly looked for information that helped to validate or otherwise what was said by the respondents. If they talked about their training at ballet school I found sources that related specifically to training at different ballet schools. I was fortunate enough to be invited to attend a master class on ballet technique as an observer. This helped me understand better what the respondents talked about when they mentioned their daily ballet class. A transcript of what I observed during this class is in Appendix Three.

As I am not a trained or a qualified dancer/practitioner, I felt I needed to take the element of prolonged engagement (to establish credibility – as discussed in 2.5.2) a step further, to assist with the contextual validation in terms of the world of dance. I immersed myself in the world of dance, attending performances across the different dance genres – classical, contemporary, and dance theatre. It is my belief that this immersion would give me insights and contexts into developments within the world of dance. I attended performances here in Melbourne, as part of the Australian Ballet season and also all dance performances as part of the Melbourne Arts Festival held annually in October. Whenever I travelled overseas, which was about twice a year, I made it a point to attend dance performances in the cities I visited. In Appendix Five is a list of dance performances I have attended over the past ten years.
I also sent copies of the transcriptions to the respondents as a means of ensuring contextual accuracy and validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, I intend to use a friend to assist with the peer debriefing. This friend is helpful as she had been a dancer in London and New York and would be ideal to assist me with this task.

2.7.8. The data analysis method

In undertaking the data analysis, the naturalist in a NI takes into account his or her tacit knowledge, and to build upon it. The purpose of this tacit knowledge is not in giving direction to the research or where it is heading to, but rather to help the researcher to “gain new meanings, new ideas, and new applications of the old” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 196). The method of analysis used in conducting a NI is that of “inductive data analysis”, states Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 202). It has been identified as being similar to content analysis, where the processes involve “unitising and categorising” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 203). The theory that results is “grounded from the data itself” advocates Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 204) and is called Grounded Theory.

What is specific about Grounded Theory is that “the constant overlap and interplay between data collection and analysis phases is given specific procedural form...a generation of new theory should emerge as a process...and is an outcome of empirical analysis” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 156). No “a priori preliminary theory is possible as the information gathered in the field forms the basis for describing, detailing and explaining the system” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 205). So no outcome or output can or will be anticipated here.

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) state grounded theory is both “the method and the end result of the research process” (p. 154). As a methodology, grounded theory “consists of a set of specific procedures for carving out middle-range theory from and with the help of empirical data” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 154) by employing both “induction and deduction” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 156). Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) assert that “the grounded theory approach is developed for theorising the data through and with the
help of a highly formalised and descriptive methodology” with an “emphasis on the formal coding process” (p. 156). This theorising of the data is often associated with the term theoretical sensitivity referring to the “personal quality of the researcher” who has an “awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data” obtained from a number of different sources: “literature, which includes readings on theory, research and documents”, professional experience, and personal experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 41-42). Strauss and Corbin (1990) state “insight and understanding about a phenomenon increase as you interact with your data” and this “increasing sensitivity to concepts, their meanings, and relationships...increasing insight and recognition of the parameters of the evolving theory” (p. 43).

NI, as devised by Lincoln and Guba (1985), advocate for the use of the Comparative Method provided by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 (p. 339). This method of constant comparison requires “empirical indicators from the data, such as events or actions or activities ...compared with each other in the analysis process with the aim of searching for similarities and differences between them” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 159). From this process of constant comparison, state Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) “you as researcher will be able to identify underlying and emerging uniformities in the indicators and with these you are able to produce a coded category or concept” (p. 159). This process of coding data is “open, axial, and selective” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 160). This process of the selective coding of data serves to “explicate the story by finding the core category and linking the other categories to the core category” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 166).

I began the process of analysis by collating, for each question, all the individual responses of each of the seven respondents. From reading the responses, I endeavoured to determine how the incidents were critical for them. These incidents were then coded by number, and each successive incident identified was then being compared with previous incidents. The coded incidents were then classified by category. The categories were
identified partly using tacit knowledge and also those identified by the respondents in the interviews themselves (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 341).

After all the incidents were identified, and all the categories exhausted, I went on looking to see if I could integrate some of these categories, and hence incidents. This process of integration forced me to make comparison shifts from “more or less intuitive look alikeness or feel alikeness judgement to a judgement of whether a new incident exhibits the category properties that have been tentatively identified” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 342). After I processed all of the data, more and more modifications became apparent, and I finally arrived at a list of integrated categories that were reduced in size, and hence became saturated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 343).

The other arm of grounded theory is the end result of the research process. Strauss and Corbin (1988) state the “theory evolves during the actual research and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (p. 158). This method is about discovering theory from data, and Glaser and Strauss (1967) take the view that the “adequacy of a theory cannot be divorced from the process of creating it” (p. 5). Glaser and Strauss (1967) add further that “in discovering theory, one generates conceptual categories of their properties from evidence, then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept” (p. 23). “The constant comparing of many groups draws the sociologist’s attention to their many similarities and differences. Considering these leads him to generate abstract categories and their properties, since they emerge from the data, will clearly be important to a theory explaining the kind of behaviour under observation” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 37).

Once I arrived at a list of critical events in the lives of these respondents, I was then able to repeat the entire process again and look at the other qualitative issues related to the secondary research questions listed earlier in Chapter One. I looked at what made these events critical for these respondents from a qualitative viewpoint. I also looked at the nature
of the decisions that had to be made as a result of these events. As a result of this qualitative review of factors, I was to determine how different or similar these events were and their impact on the lives of these individual respondents. From all these, the theory emerged.

The writing of the results was in the form of a case study report as “the reporting mode of choice is the case study format” as advocated by the Naturalistic Inquirer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 357). The case study is ideal for the naturalist as it allows for the thick description so essential in this methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 359). Lincoln and Guba (1985) state further that a case study “builds on the readers tacit knowledge”, shows the interaction “between the inquirer and respondents”, and provides “the thick description so necessary for judgements of transferability” (p. 359).

Stake (1994) states “a case study is defined by interest in individual cases not by the method of inquiry used” (p. 236), it is a “functioning specific” (p. 236) and “is both the process of learning about the case and the product of our learning” (p. 237). Stake (1994) also states that the purpose of case study “is not theory building – though at other times the researcher may just do that” (p. 236), and can be seen as “exploration leading up to generalisation-producing studies, or as an occasional early step in theory building” (p. 239). Such is the case I am advocating for use in this research.

Stake (1994) asserts that “researchers may study a number of cases jointly in order to inquire into the phenomenon, population or general condition” and he calls it a “collective case study”, an “instrumental study to several cases” (p. 237). It is sometimes referred to as a collective case study (Stake, 1994). Baxter and Jack (2008) state that “a multiple or collective case study will allow the researcher to analyse within each setting and across settings” and to examine “several cases to understand the similarities and differences” (p. 550). Stake (2003) asserts that this learning from the case will assist in knowledge transfer from researcher to reader as it will provide “certain insights into the human condition even while being well aware of the atypicality of the case” (p. 147).
Yin (1994) points out that generalisation of results from multiple case design, is made to theory and not to populations. In keeping with this understanding, the writing of the results in this research is a collective case study, as advocated by Stake, with the express purpose of making advances towards some form of grounded theory.

2.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter began with a justification for why the methodology chapter follows the introduction. I advocated for a change and departure from the traditional point of view. This followed on with a discussion of why I chose to use a qualitative research method. I continued after to deal specifically with the search for an appropriate methodology for this research. I also presented and analysed three different and inter-related methodologies of qualitative research. In doing so, I clarified my reasons for choosing NI – the methodology of choice, by eliminating the two others, phenomenology and phenomenography, as being inappropriate for the research as I had envisaged. I went on further and elucidated on the method I used to undertake the research. The process used to collect my data was informed by the requirements of the methodology itself, and hence I was guided by the statements on the use of the methodology.
Every day, I become more and more convinced that those who do not make the struggle with nature their main concern never get anywhere.

Vincent Van Gogh, 1887

CHAPTER 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I present a discussion and analysis of the range of literature that informs my research. It is important to state that the focus of the study encompasses a range of different and disparate fields of study, from developmental psychology, to dance education, elements of culture, acquisition of gender identity, and sexuality and sexual identity. The three main areas of discussion revolve around, dance, gender, and sexuality and sexual identity.

My research looks at male dancers/choreographers as they traverse the course of their lives. In doing so, the fields of study that I will look at are diverse. I begin with a discussion of the nature of dance, to dance training and education, and dance as a career choice. I also look at aspects of the construction of masculinity and culture, in relation to dance.

This will be followed by an assessment of the related issues of male life-cycle development and the development of an adult identity. The psychological aspects of self-identity will inevitably encompass gender and sexual identity. As I asked the respondents to reflect critically on their lives, the issues surrounding the use of biographies and autobiographies will also be considered. Finally, as the respondents in the interviews all self-identified as being non-heterosexual, mainly homosexual, the related issues of isolation, exile, immigration and homophobia are also reviewed.

As these respondents grew into their identity as dancers/choreographers, and acquired a sexual identity, these facts would have had some (if any) impact on their careers. I will finally look at how some accomplished dancer/choreographers tackled these different and inter-related issues as they negotiated the course of their individual lives.
3.1 WHAT is DANCE?

Dance means so many things for so many different people. Copeland and Cohen (1983) state that dance can sometimes be defined as “any patterned, rhythmic movement in space and time” (p. 1). Such an attempt at a definition can be problematic, as all patterned and rhythmic movements performed by all humans cannot, for all intents and purposes, be deemed to be dancing per se (Copeland & Cohen, 1983). Cohen (1983) states it is movement that is “voluntary, ordered, and performed for its own sake rather than to accomplish any practical end outside of itself” (p. 14). Kealiinohomoku (1970) attempted a definition of dance in 1965, which was revised in 1970:

Dance is a transient mode of expression, performed in a given form and style by the human body moving in space. Dance occurs through purposefully selected and controlled rhythmic movements; the resulting phenomenon is recognised as dance both by the performer and the observing members of a given group.

(p. 541)

Kealiinohomoku (1970) states that the distinguishing features in the definition of dance are: first, that it is a human endeavour, and second, the intent to dance and “the acknowledgement of such an activity by another group”, makes it unique (p. 541). This is an anthropological view of dance, and recognises it as human behaviour, as being purposeful and intentionally rhythmical movement of the body (Hanna, 1987).

3.1.1 Dance as life activity

Dance pervades every sphere of human behaviour and human activity, and Ellis (1923) states it is “entwined with all human tradition of war, of labour, of pleasure, of education...in accordance with which the moral life of men must be woven” (p. 479). It is
“not only intimately associated with religion, it has an equally intimate association with love” (Ellis, 1923, p. 483). Hanna (1987), made this insightful observation:

To dance is human, and humanity almost universally expresses itself in dance.

Dance interweaves with other aspects of human life, such as communication and learning, belief systems, social relations and political dynamics, loving and fighting, and urbanisation and change. Dance appears primary among aesthetic forms and the instrument of dance, the human body, contributes to other forms which use its spatial, temporal, and kinetic elements. (p. 3)

Dance is a human endeavour, and it can involve physical behaviour, cultural behaviour and social behaviour (Hanna, 1987). It is human behaviour and it is kinetic as it involves the release of energy by the muscles in the body responding to stimuli received from the brain (Hanna, 1987). Martin (1965) states that movement is the substance of dance, and “movement is the most elementary physical experience of human life” (p. 6). In this movement, you can find the “expression of all emotional experiences” (Martin, 1965, p. 7).

Dance has also been used to reflect a people’s values, beliefs and attitude and hence, can take on a cultural aspect (Hanna, 1987). Hanna (1987) states further that dance involves a social dimension when it represents how groups interact with each other, and dance also exhibits a psychological component when it exemplifies the “cognitive and emotional experiences” of the choreographer in their dance creations (p. 4).

Many professional dancers earn a living from their dancing. In doing so, dance represents a form of economic behaviour, says Hanna (1987). Dance has often been used as a means for expressing and articulating political attitudes, beliefs and values, in as much as it can often be a better medium that the spoken word (Hanna, 1987). Hanna (1987) expressed this best when she articulated it as: “the dance medium often comes into play when there is a lack of verbal expression” (p. 4). Dance can be a means of communicating emotional experiences, perceptions and truths, stated Martin (1965). Dance, as a form of human
activity, can also be viewed as ethnoology, cultural anthropology, linguistic anthropology, physical anthropology and in addition, sociolinguistics (Hanna, 1987). Ultimately, dance is a life activity, and to dance is human.

### 3.1.2 Dance as aesthetic

Cohen (1983) states that the meaning of aesthetic has changed with the passing of time, and the change of personalities, and it is sometimes considered to be the “philosophy of beauty” or the “philosophy of art” (p. 12). But, in dance it is not always clear what we mean by the term – the aesthetics of dance.

McFee (1992) asks “what is required in order that I take a particular movement sequence to be dance?” (p. 69). What is involved here is an assessment or judgement of the quality of the movement, and hence its aesthetic value. This judgement, as in all judgements, cannot and will not be value “free of bias or totally objective” (McFee, 1992, p. 21). Aesthetic judgements can be subjective and still be relevant, as aesthetic judgements, states McFee (1992), and are likely to be discussed as non-objective.

Related to this is whether this movement is artful, artistic or aesthetic, would depend on our experience and McFee (1992) state that “all experience takes place under concepts…and different concepts imply different experiences” (p. 39). For me what this means is, what I experience depends on what concepts I have. So, for me to identify it as dance, or otherwise, will really depend on my concepts about art, in order to make an artistic judgement, or under concepts that make it just “merely aesthetic” (McFee, 1992, p. 42).

McFee (1992) states: If I am at a dance performance and I am enthralled by the quality of the movements, then my appreciation is of “the aesthetic, not of the artistic” (p. 43).

McFee (1992) makes these important distinctions: the first relates to how we see things. If we see something as art, that gives it its significance. To see something as dance, therefore requires an understanding of the formal significance of some of its features, and this significance, in most instances; is from other works, where such similar features have
appeared before (McFee, 1992). This is because the logic of appreciation differs depending on our focus, so dance would amount to dance because “the movements and gestures gave it its precise meaning” (pp. 43-44). In order to distinguish mere movement from dance requires an understanding of aesthetics, and to really understand aesthetics, the focus should be on meaning, explanation and understanding (McFee, 1992).

Fraleigh (1987) makes an even stronger statement in relation to dance and aesthetics: dance has no “intrinsic purpose beyond the aesthetic” and that the aesthetic is the “consciously intended and desired end” because it provides for self-expression and self-knowledge in “human movement” (p. 28).

3.1.3 Dance as kinaesthetic

Dance is kinaesthetic as it involves action and movement, which is formed, and it is also human movement which is performed (Hanna, 1987; Kemp, 1996; Martin, 1965; McFee, 1992; Sheets-Johnstone, 1979). Langer (1953) states “all dance motion is gesture or an element that exhibits a gesture” (p. 28). Langer (1953) asserts:

Gesture is vital movement; to the one who performs it, it is known precisely as kinetic experience, that is, as action, and somewhat more vaguely by sight, as an affect. To others it appears as a visible motion...So, it is always at once subjective and objective, personal and public, willed (or evoked) and perceived. (p. 29)

Sheets-Johnstone (1979) states dance “is a force in time and space, but it is not formed movement”, rather “it is movement form which is created” as a result of it (p. x). Martin (1965) adds that such movement, “in and of itself is a medium for the transference of an aesthetic and emotional concept” from one person’s consciousness to another (p. 13). Martin (1965) also states that when a spectator watches any movement, “through kinaesthetic sympathy you respond to the impulse of the dancer which has expressed itself by means of a series of movements” and these movements form the “links between the dancer’s intention and your perception of it” (p. 12). Implicit in all this is the understanding that dance is an
experienced phenomenon (Hanna, 1987), borne of the individual’s “desire to externalise personal, authentic experience” (Martin, 1965, p. 19), and the immediate experience of movement is a basic foundation of dance (Sheets-Johnstone, 1979). Hanna (1987) further states that dance has the effect of providing a form of “immediate and sensuous experience” (p. 27).

McFee (1992) makes this distinction: for it to be dance it must fulfil a number of different criteria, if not, all movement undertaken by laymen will for all intents and purposes be deemed to be dance. McFee states that dance is a special type of movement whose distinctive character lies in the way “we view it and the meaning we give to it” (1992, pp. 51-52). Meanings do change, relative to the context in which we view it, so we need to enhance this understanding by adding further the context of the performance, and in addition to that, the “description under which the action is intended” (McFee, 1992, p. 55). Hence, context and intention is also paramount in our understanding of dance as movement.

McFee (1992) adds further that it would be quite wrong to view dance as just movements of the body, and to totally disregard the actions of the person performing it. He emphasized the need to recognise the specific purposes embedded in human activities, and in this case, “the artistic purposes in dance” (McFee, 1992, p. 56).

What makes movement constitute dance, therefore, is the context in which it is performed, and how that is perceived by us as members of the viewing audience (McFee, 1992). This performance, and our perceptions of the performance, is then influenced by our concepts giving rise to our appreciation, which presents itself as criticism (McFee, 1992). It is through this process of the giving of meaning and understanding to this human action which we call dance, gives dance its distinctive character (McFee, 1992).

Dance, by its very nature, is also deemed a performing art. McFee (1992) asserts that the nature of dance implies that it is “capable of being performed a number of times” (p. 88) and this act of performance takes time to see and to experience, but more importantly they do
“involve events which are in the flow of time, occurring at a particular moment, and so on” (p. 89). A rather distinctive characteristic of dance is the fact that as soon as it is performed, “it is gone” and yet, it has permanence, as “the same dance can be performed the very next day or at some later date” (McFee, 1992, p. 89). This in turn raises the issue of identity, whether a dance is the same as that performed the very next day, as dances are “art of the multiple type” (McFee, 1992). McFee adds that dance as a multiple art brings with it a number of difficulties, because I can question if it is just a difference in the performance or just a difference in the thoughts or feelings felt and expressed by the performer (1992).

Cohen (1983) expresses this feature about dance:

Of all species of art objects, the dance is the most problematically unstable. Because its medium is the human body and because bodies – along with the personalities that inhabit them – appear in many forms, the dance work is constantly changing – sometimes slightly. Sometimes drastically – depending on who dances it. This is over and above any changes made deliberately by the choreographer, who frequently chooses to alter his supposedly completed work.

(p. 16)

One possible way of overcoming this issue is if there was “available a notation of that art form” and dance notation does exit in a variety of forms (McFee, 1992, p. 98). This can be further enhanced by music and costume, to give it its dance identity (McFee, 1992).

The next issue which must be addressed relates to the interpretation of dance, as the performer’s interpretation is “unique in the performing arts” (McFee, 1992, p. 101). What we can see so far is that the key characteristics of the work is locatable by the notated score (dance and music) and hence, offer us some insight into particular performance(s) (McFee, 1992). The dance can then be made to be more “determinate” as the features of the performance can typically be “provided by the performer through their interpretation” (McFee, 1992, p. 103).
McFee (1992) states the performer’s interpretation of a work that is then tied in to a critic’s interpretation, which characteristically is a word based interpretation of the dance performed. McFee (1992) further states that the “object” the critic uses in formulating his interpretation then is “the physical realisation of the work itself” (p. 107). McFee (1992) asserts that what makes a dance performed today similar to that which was danced yesterday, is then a matter of critical judgment. Therefore, any critic’s interpretation of the construction of a particular dance then makes dance an object for understanding and appreciation (McFee, 1992).

3.2 DANCE and EDUCATION

In this section, I discuss the education of dancers, focussing mainly on male dancers. I begin by looking at the study of phenomenology, which has been the prime focus and forms the basis of dance education at the tertiary level. I will also look at the influence of the Russian tradition in dance schools in the United Kingdom and Australia. I will then refocus on dance as a profession and career for the male dancer.

3.2.1 Phenomenology in dance

Carter (1998) argues that one of the key areas of development in dance during the latter half of the twentieth century has been “toward self reflection” (p. 119). This has resulted, states Carter, in writers in dance questioning the “nature and status of knowledge” by exploring and critiquing the “epistemological frameworks” with which they are working (1998, p. 119). Carter (1998) identifies Sondra Horton Fraleigh as such a writer, who looks at the contribution of philosophy (phenomenology) to the understanding of dance.

Fraleigh (1998) looks at phenomenology, specifically existential phenomenology, as a way of describing and explaining dance, by focussing on the experience of the dancer and that of the audience. Fraleigh (1998) states that phenomenology is based on “immediate experience” which hopes to look at meaning, and to look at the perspectives of the experience,
which can then be communicated (p. 135) to others. Dance, states Sheets-Johnstone (1979), is a “formed and performed art which is something alive, vibrant and engaging as it happens on the stage” (p. 1). She adds further that dance is first and foremost a created phenomenon which is presented and appears before us and that which we can experience, making it a “uniquely dynamic form” (Sheets-Johnstone, 1979, p. 5).

This immediate experience, taking place in the present moment, takes its meaning in part from the past and from the future, states Fraleigh (1998). Fraleigh (1998) goes on to state that no phenomenon can ever be perceived in “static unchanging perspectives”, in fact such phenomenon exist through time as time and motion, and are “ever present conditions” which influences our attention and perspective (p. 137). Dance “arises in consciousness as the motion reveals the intent of the whole or of the parts” (Fraleigh, 1998, p. 137).

Fraleigh (1998) identifies with the concept of essence in dance. The first of these essences relates to identity. The identity of a work, although individual, but through the perception of a viewer (critic) is “consciously constructed” by that viewer, asserts Fraleigh (1998, p. 137). Therefore, in describing that dance, we colour that understanding of that dance with our perceptions, attitudes and assumptions (Fraleigh, 1998). As a result then, states Fraleigh (1998), the descriptive process is based on our experiences and a looking back at that experience in order to “bring it to language” (p. 138). Sheets-Johnstone (1979) expresses the same idea a little differently: she advocates that the meaning of dance comes alive after we have “lived the experience of the dance” and it is through this lived experience that one can arrive at not just the sense of the dance, but also the “essence of the dance” (p. 4).

The next essence advocated by Fraleigh is that of meaning. As a dancer, choreographer, or critic, a dance by repetition can draw upon one’s “body memory” which in its description gives rise or builds towards meaning, as it allows others to see things the way you see it or to at least understand what you see (1998, p. 139). This meaning or truth created by the choreographer, then by the dancer, viewed by the audience and then explained by the
critic. Phenomenologists are therefore crucial in trying to explain the truth of their experience so that others can find the meaning in it (Fraleigh, 1998, p. 139). Fraleigh (1998) expresses the point that by describing a dance for an audience, what is being carried out at the same time is “a definition” (p. 140). By describing when dance is happening, one is also going a long way towards answering another definitional question of what is dance (Fraleigh, 1998).

Herein is the next essence: that of definition.

The final essence, that of imagination asserts Fraleigh (1998), relates not just to movement in the dance, but the “motivational source, or metaphor behind the movement” (p. 141). These movement patterns lead to images, which then make an impression on the imagination of the viewer, which can then be the focus of a description (Fraleigh, 1998). Phenomenology, it can be seen here, provides for the identity, meaning, definition and imagination so vital in dance. Another sphere where these essences can also be asserted is in the education of the dancers themselves.

### 3.2.2 Dance as higher education

The concept of self-reflection as identified by Carter in Section 3.2.1 is picked up by Sheets-Johnstone (1979) who states: this reflection allows educators in dance to find more “meaningful ways” of teaching (p. 7). In doing so, states Sheets-Johnstone (1979), they are able to convey to their students, in “more and more enlightened ways” as to what is involved in, and what preparation is necessary in, creating and presenting dance (p. 7). Sheets-Johnstone believes that a phenomenological approach to dance offers the possibility of bringing together movement and philosophy, creation, performance, and criticism into “some kind of meaningful relationship” which will make a noteworthy contribution to dance education (1979, p. 8). This brings us into the area of the philosophy and training in dance education.

No true appreciation of dance education can be made without making reference to the works of Margaret H’Doubler in the field of dance education. She is credited as being one of
the pioneers in the field of dance education (Reynolds & McCormick, 2003, p. 175).

H’Doubler (1985) felt very strongly about the value of dance in the education system, and to do this she felt required first and foremost, the development of theory based on the knowledge of the “structure of the body” and also of the “laws of bodily movement” (p. 59). To achieve this, she added, took more than “pedagogical preaching”, but it needed instead more “intelligent stimulation to self activity” (H’Doubler, 1985, p. 60).

H’Doubler (1985) expressed this strongly: there are two aspects to dance education, one, “the capacity to take in”, and the other, “the capacity to give out” (p. 62). This ability to take in she states as being impressed, and the ability to give out is about being able to express outwardly (H’Doubler, 1985). It is in this that phenomenology plays a vital role, in making dance education what H’Doubler calls “emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and also physical” (1985, p. 62).

H’Doubler criticises traditional dance education as being far too centred on performance, but what should be studied instead is how to use what she calls “creative motor experience” as the basis for instruction (1985, p. 64). H’Doubler (1985) advocates for the ideal where we need to “keep the creative impulse alive” through the maturing years and to help carry these impulses into the realities of adult life with greater power and with “an enlightened purpose” (p. 65).

It is not enough for dance studies to provide students with the opportunity to explore with actual dance movements; although they are vital for the student’s understanding of movement, they cannot, states Sheets-Johnstone (1979) be the means to teaching students about dance composition. Sheets-Johnstone (1979) feels that dance composition is an important part of a dance students education, but to really do this properly involves giving the students an appreciation of the nature of dance as an “illusion of force” which involves working with movement as a “revelation of force” and creating it as a “dynamic form in the making” (p. 133). What this means is to allow students to work with movement as sheer
appearance which means “abstracting movement” from daily life “as the symptomatic or referential expression of feeling” (p. 133). To do this, it is critical to allow students to work with movement as “dynamic form in the making”, and “each dynamic form in the making could potentially be a dance” (Sheets-Johnstone, 1979, p. 135). Each of these is potentially a dance because it is sheer form of movement because it creates a “beginning illusion of force” (Sheets-Johnstone, 1979, p. 135)

Sheets-Johnstone (1979) asserts that in teaching dance composition, it is also really important for the student to have lived the experience of the movement to begin with because as the dancer is composing, “they must be aware of the form which they are creating”, and by doing so, the composer gains a reflective viewpoint where “they are living the form they are creating” and then having that critical view “where they know what they are working towards” (p. 137). Once the students has lived the total experience, the students can then go on “to consider their inherent structures” which are the more traditional teachings in dance education (Sheets-Johnstone, 1979, p.138). The dance education advocated here is not merely about the learning of skills, facts, and the like about dance, but it is more about creativity, performance and criticism, and also “individual growth and self-realisation of the dancer as a dancer” and also the “dancer as a choreographer” (Sheets-Johnstone, 1979, p. 145).

3.3 DANCE and the RUSSIAN TRADITION

Dance education can make a unique contribution to education in general; but the medium of such education must involve the exposure to artistic dance and its criticism (Sparshott, 1994). In addition, this system must involve instruction of “the masterpieces”, as it is a powerful tool, and that practitioners particularly choreographers, must be brought into the school to explain these masterpieces (Sparshott, 1994, p. 158). The use of choreographers allows and affords the students practical training in choreography (Sparshott, 1994). For this to work, therefore, requires radical change, and most importantly these Institutions will have to equip themselves for the change by training and recruiting the right people for those jobs.
(Sparshot, 1994, p. 159). This leads us to the actual teaching of dance at various dance schools and academies.

### 3.3.1 The Ballet Russes’ Influence

Historically, classical dance or ballet has its roots in the courts of France under the patronage of Louis XIV (Au, 1988; Au, 2002; Reynolds & McCormick, 2003) from as far back as the Seventeenth Century. Ballet, states Solway (1998) was one of the European fashions that took root in Russia especially under the patronage of the Imperial Russian Court from as early as 1738. As a result of this Imperial patronage, many French and Italian dance masters took up residence in Russia, especially in the main centres of Moscow and St Petersburg; resulting in Russian ballet growing in popularity and stature (Solway, 1998, p. 63).

Even in the twentieth century, the popularity, success, and influence of Russian ballet have not waned. No single company has had more profound and far reaching an influence on modern ballet as the Ballet Russes’ (Garafola, 1989; Reynolds & McCormick, 2003; Stokes, 1935). Garafola (1989) states that this company, in its twenty year existence has been solely responsible for three things, namely: transforming ballet into a modern art, “brokering remarkable marriages” between dance and the other arts and most importantly, for producing dancers who emerged as teachers and ballet masters who continued to work in the major European centres after the company disbanded (p. vii). Some critics went even further to state that this “revolution that transformed ballet in the early twentieth century” had with it “homoerotic undercurrents” in its most innovative productions (Latimer, 1999, p 173).

Reynolds and McCormick (2003) state that the Russian elements considered so exciting “began with the music…then there was the décor” and finally “the subject matter” which ranged from “bacchanals, orgies, sadistic femme fatales, and androgynous men”
Latimer (1999) states that some of their productions have been critiqued as offering alternative “pleasurable structures of looking – a sight stimulated or scopophilic pleasure in the corporeal spectacle and a narcissistic pleasure achieved through identification” (p. 174).

Reynolds and McCormick (2003) acknowledge the ballets choreographed by Nijinsky for the Ballet Russes are legendary to this very day: *L’Après-midi d’un faune* for depicting the “awakening of sexuality, the first ever to be so explicit” (p. 54), *Jeux*, for being “the first ballet to treat a contemporary theme (a love triangle)” (p. 55), and *Le Sacre du Printemps* for causing a scandal where the audience “virtually rioted, screaming so loudly...police had to be summoned” (p. 56). It was Nijinsky himself, states Reynolds and McCormick, through his choreography, who paved the way for “virtually all modern-dance developments of the twentieth century” (2003, p. 56).

Burt (2001) states “available evidence suggests that the association between male dance and homosexuality arose only in the early Twentieth century with Diaghilev” (p. 213). Burt (2001) asserts that “by presenting Nijinsky in a series of ballets that showcased his talents, Diaghilev not only introduced the male dancer to the stages of London, Paris, New York” but also established a “sophisticated gay audience for ballet” (p. 214). “He made ballet into a forum that in effect created and supported the idea of the artistic homosexual man and defined a homosexual aesthetic sensibility” and built ballet’s reputation “as an area of employment in which gay men could be open and safe” (Burt, 2001, p. 214). Diaghilev, as Director of the Ballet Russes, not only routinely played up “to his gay spectators” but at the same time paid “homage to time honoured spectacular conventions” and in doing so he offered both “homosexuals and heterosexuals alike respite from sexual censure” (Latimer, 1999, p. 182). By doing this Diaghilev was in fact offering his gay spectators a chance to “place themselves and see themselves in the dominant culture in a way that made them more visible than they were supposed to be” enabling them to claim a “cultural and physical place for themselves” (Latimer, 1999, pp. 182-183).
3.3.2 The Ballet Russes Alumni

However, the collapse of the Ballet Russes in 1929 (after the death of its founder Sergei Diaghilev) directly, although not necessarily intentionally, resulted in the rest of Europe carrying on the traditions established by the Ballet Russes, carriers of the Russian tradition, through the teaching of dance by its former members (Garafola, 1989; Williamson, 1946). Serge Lifar became the Artistic Director of the Paris Opera Ballet (POB), a position he held for nearly thirty years (Garafola, 1989). During that time, he “choreographed more than sixty ballets” and he also “reaffirmed the male presence in a country where travesty had been almost unquestioned” (Reynolds & McCormick, 2003, p. 216). It would be another 25 years before another classically trained and charismatic Russian dancer, Rudolf Nureyev, who in 1983 took over the direction of the POB, and whom Reynolds and McCormick (2003) credits for rescuing the Opera “from the twenty five year period of decline and self satisfied insularity following Lifar” (p. 222)

In England, two notable “Diaghilev alumni” states Williamson (1946) and Garafola (1989), laid the groundwork for British Ballet. Marie Rambert established what we now call the Ballet Rambert, while Ninette de Valois established the Vic Wells Ballet which became the Royal Ballet (Garafola, 1989). Both Rambert and de Valois were deemed to be the “founding mothers of British Ballet” (Williamson, 1946, p. 52) who began their work in the 1920s, at a time when “England had no native tradition of serious ballet” (Reynolds & McCormick, 2003, p. 182). Reynolds and McCormick (2003) add further that de Valois wanted “to create a large national company, grounded in the Russian classics but with a distinctly British feeling” whereas Rambert was “more interested in an anti-establishment group devoted to chamber works” (p. 183).

Many of the other Diaghilev alumni settled in the United States of America, and most notably, Georges Balanchine who is responsible for the creation of the American Ballet Theatre and also for the New York City Ballet (Garafola, 1989, p. 376). Balanchine is
credited by Reynolds and McCormick (2003) as being “one of the century’s greatest teachers” and who saw his ability to “remould bodies in the classroom as one of his most important contributions to dance” (p. 267). I will next focus some attention on the strong influences the Russian tradition played on the dance traditions of the UK and Australia

### 3.3.3 The Russian Influence in UK and Australia

Historically, the Royal Ballet School has its origins with the founding of the school in 1926, when Dame Ninette de Valois, a former corps de ballet dancer with the Ballet Russes (Garafola, 1989), opened her academy of Choreographic Art (The Royal Ballet School, n.d., section 2b). Reynolds and McCormick state that de Valois had been “deeply inspired by Diaghilev”, but “envisioned a British School and repertory influenced by, but independent of, the Russian tradition” (2003, p. 182). As she did much of her practical training with the Ballet Russes whose background, training and traditions has its roots from Russia, or the former USSR, I would expect the form of the school to be similar to that of the Bolshoi Ballet, sharing similar teaching styles and syllabi, incorporating a similar operating structure.

In 1931, in collaboration with Lillian Bayliss, the Vic Wells Ballet School was formed, feeding students into the Vic Wells Ballet Company; which in 1939 was renamed the Sadler’s Wells Ballet School and the company the Sadler’s Wells Ballet (Reynolds & McCormick, 2003; The Royal Ballet School, n.d., section 2b). In 1946, the ballet company moved to a permanent home at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and in 1947, the school moved from the Sadler’s Wells Theatre to Baron’s Court, resulting in vocational ballet training being combined with general education (The Royal Ballet School, n.d., section 2b). In 1955/56 the Lower School moved to their current premises at Richmond Park and became a residential school for general educational and vocational ballet training, with the Royal Charter being granted in October 1956 (The Royal Ballet School, n.d., section 2b). In 2003, the Upper School moved to its new premises in Floral Street alongside the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden fulfilling a much loved dream of its founder (The Royal Ballet
School, n.d., section 2b). The School is now both a leading classical ballet school in the United Kingdom but also had a worldwide reputation attracting the best students from all over the world (The Royal Ballet School, n.d., section 2a).

It is worthy of note that the current Director of the Royal Ballet School is the former Director of the Australian Ballet School (The Royal Ballet School, n.d., section 13) – Gailene Stock. Her selection to the position of Director at the Royal Ballet must signal to many the standard she had established at the Australian Ballet School (ABS) in Melbourne, as a premier dance training institution in Australia.

Australia also has a strong Russian connection in the world of classical dance – ballet. The Imperial Russian Ballet made their first visit here in 1913 and then again in 1926 and 1929 with Anna Pavlova (Freeman, 1998). But, it was in 1938 when J. C. Williamson staged the return of Colonel de Basil’s London based Covent Garden Russian Ballet’s visit that saw Edouard Borovansky, a member of the *corps des ballet* (Brissenden, 1997; Freeman, 1998) returning to Australia again, which established this Russian connection with Australia.

It was Edouard Borovansky, a native of the then Czechoslovakia; and his wife Xenia Borovansky, a refugee from her native Russia, who recognised the large untapped potential for ballet in this country, and who moved to Australia, which they saw as a new frontier for ballet (Kitcher, 2001; Potter, 1998). They established what was to be called the Borovansky Ballet, which was to be the precursor and fertile training ground for what in September 1962 became the Australian Ballet (AB) (Brissenden, 1997; Kitcher, 2001). This strong Russian influence would undoubtedly also have an effect on the training of ballet in Australia today. The Australian Ballet School (ABS) was created in 1964 and has for the past forty years trained dancers for the parent company, the Australian Ballet (The Australian Ballet School, 2007, Section 2b). Its current vision is to produce dancers with “a distinctive Australian style” by providing a unique and professional programme that will “honour the past, achieve the present, and create the future” (The Australian Ballet School, 2007, Section 2a). Like the
Royal Ballet School, it carries this vision and mission through an eight year programme providing the best academic and vocational training (The Australian Ballet School, 2007, Section 2b, Section 3a).

3.4 **DANCE as a PROFESSION**

Once students have graduated from ballet and/or dance schools, they will audition to join and be part of a dance or ballet company where they begin their professional dance career. They usually start off in a Ballet Company, as part of the corps de ballet.

3.4.1 **Dancing as corps de ballet**

Mazo (1974) provides us with strong insights into what it was like dancing as a member of the corps de ballet, based on his experience as a member of the NYCB in 1974. Mazo (1974) states corps dancers are by virtue of their position anonymous, and are paid “to subdue their personalities to their uniform” (p. 94). He adds that they are members of the ensemble and are usually “young, dedicated, overworked and underpaid” and are seldom offered contracts covering the whole year (Mazo, 1974, p. 95).

Mazo (1974) states they are subject to physical stress due to the “nature of the speed, pain, and acrobatics involved in their profession” and the “emotional stress in their quest for perfection”, and in their drive and ambition (p. 93). It is not uncommon, states Wood (1999), for these dancers to find some kind of supplemental financing for things like food, rent and transportation (p. 63). Many of these dancers join the company at a “very young age, some between sixteen and eighteen; while some men come later in life in their twenties, with an average working life of ten years”, promotions are infrequent, and they depend on their talent technique, style and hard work (Mazo, 1974, p. 96). The odds are against them most of the time (Mazo, 1974). Some companies, performing a limited repertoire, may have performance schedules and rehearsals less hectic, if not, they may have to “perform and execute complex steps that must be performed very quickly” and when added to a performance schedule of
forty or fifty different works per year, is quite “physically demanding and hectic” (Mazo, 1974, p. 97). They may at times, state Mazo (1974), be even “called upon to do solo dancing but are still paid as corps members” (p. 97).

These dancers, although very young, know from a very young age that they want to be and are going to be dancers, they have made all the sacrifices to get this far, but they know they still have to dance, try for roles and aim at advancement in the company and when you are aged seventeen, that usually means that you have no life outside of dance (Mazo, 1974, p. 100). To achieve this, Mazo says, requires that you dance, get selected to dance and that the Artistic Director likes you or likes your dancing (1974, p. 100).

Mazo (1974) states that ballet is not a “democratic art, it demands absolute adherence to arbitrary rules” (p. 109). If these dancers “do not get promoted after a certain period of time out of the corps de ballet”, they may have to consider other options and stop being dancers, and this states Mazo (1974) can cause problems (p. 111). Their options, although varied, are all tied to dancing, “joining another company, teaching at a school or college, finding other jobs within the company”, while others if fortunate enough; “may try their hand at choreography” (Mazo, 1974, p. 112).

3.4.2 Dancing as soloists, principals and stars

Mazo (1974) makes this point clearly that promotion from the corps to the rank of soloist “is a rite of passage” (p. 155). Soloists are usually older than corps members, and have also seen a bit more of the world and are therefore more highly paid, they have more time to themselves and are “likely to have had some degree of public recognition through the programs or through dancing as guests with other (lesser) companies” (Mazo, 1974, p. 155). Soloists are not “fully autonomous” states Mazo (1974) either on stage or in the company, these distinctions are reserved only for the principal dancers, and it’s the “leading dancers that have a following” (pp. 156-157).
What it takes to make a star states Mazo is a combination of style, strength, technique and a high concentration of energy (1974, p. 158). The effect a star has on a performance is many, it allows the company to charge a higher price for the tickets, and they play very much to an audience as all star performances are “inherently sexual” which appeals to both women and men (Mazo, 1974, p. 159).

According to Mazo (1974), Edward Villella is one such star at the NYCB, he describes him as an “American Mustang” because of his virility and is less brooding and less remote than other male stars (p. 160). For Villella and for many principals, states Mazo (1974), stress is the result of tensions between life within and outside the company. Villella says he has to constantly work to “earn money to keep up his alimony payments” which results in his getting injures and he usually dances while injured, “resulting in his prowess suffering” (Mazo, 1974, p. 161).

Even such stars must retire or resign eventually, but before they do they must find another way to earn a living and more importantly has to decide to “give up a job that has been a source of joy and much pleasure” (Mazo, 1974, p. 161). Like so many others in the profession, many stars will dance with other companies as guests, teach at colleges, establish careers in choreography and if they are stars, may become Artistic Directors of dance companies.

3.5 DANCE and MEN

There are many taboos about men in dance, and there are an equally large number of social obstacles, barriers, and stereotypes that men have to overcome in order to choose dance training in the first place, and then subsequently, to choosing dance as a career. This section then deals with some of the many social, mental, and psychological issues men have to deal with in becoming a professional dancer.
3.5.1 Dance as a man’s career

Johnston (1985) spent some time in the classrooms and rehearsals of dancers at the Cornish Institute in Seattle, Washington, to learn why dancers choose this art form and to ascertain what the choice entails for them. What he found is interesting, and also pertinent to this research, especially as his focus is on the male dancer.

To begin with, states Johnston, the choice of a dance career is “selecting one that is out of the mainstream and for some a high risk”, and for many others, a dance career is a career that is not considered as being important (1985, p. 19). Most men would consider a choice of a dance career as unthinkable and illogical, as to be in the arts is “frivolous” and “foreign” (Johnston, 1985, p. 22). Indirectly, what is being said is that to pursue dance is to pursue a career “so individual and personal as it transcends boundaries of the familiar and acceptable”, states Johnston (1985, p. 23). Johnston (1985) adds that for him the world of dance is “abstraction” and constructed from an individual’s view point, it’s a life concept and it is a world “dynamic” through motion (p. 23). Johnston adds further, that throughout their training, dancers are being watched by their teachers and are watching themselves in the mirrors, which for each of them was a sense of “trying to win approval for their efforts” (Johnston, 1985, p. 45). This process of learning states Johnston (1985) demands “precise articulation, control and patience” much akin to learning a foreign language (p. 45).

Johnston (1985) goes on to state that male dancers “are like myth-makers, as well as demythologizers of many of the prejudices and biases” from within and outside the dance world, as well as, he insists, they must also “confront the antagonisms of the culture towards dance” (p. 93). Johnston (1995) highlights some of the many problems that face a male dancer. To begin with, Johnston (1985) states that the male child is “effectively screened away from dance until later adolescence” as we tend not to encourage boys to take up dance, unlike in Europe, where they practice anywhere and everywhere “without fear of embarrassment or signs of disapproval” (p. 93). In America, as in many other western
countries; “dance is seen as feminine”, and dance is seldom viewed as the “form where men have traditionally exhibited their power or their virility”, the traditional signs of masculinity and manhood (Johnston, 1985, p. 93).

In addition, adds Johnston (1985), boys in the USA enter ballet late relative to the European counterparts; hence very few achieve the technical superiority of their male European counterparts. When they do enter at a later age, it is usually for a number of different reasons, to build physical endurance, to acquire skills for athletics or for emotional or psychological needs to physical express themselves; resulting in their parents being intimidated and they themselves being alienated by their peers (Johnston, 1985, p. 101). This has been the case for many of the respondents in this study.

It is clear, therefore, that male dancers are at a premium, and this can result, says Johnston, on many being tempted to leave a dance school prematurely to join a dance company before they are “technically prepared for the tasks required of them” (1985, p. 101). Johnston (1985) says that too much of the male dancers’ repertoire, especially at the level of students, is focussed on movements that the male dancers know well and to their advantage, rather than getting them to work to overcome their weaknesses. At times, choreography, which is shaped to a dancer’s ability, results in male dancers coming off looking like “tin soldiers” relative to their female partners (Johnston, 1985, p. 101). Nevertheless, since fewer men train for dance, potential male applicants are “carefully scrutinised for how they may supplement the present company or at times, how they may partner particular ballerinas” (Johnston, 1985, p. 145).

Johnston adds further to our understanding of how society impacts the view of the male dancer. He states that the main impression people have of young men who choose dance as a career is that “they are homosexual”, because dance is deemed to be feminine (Johnston, 1985, p. 156). Johnston adds further that, many of the top dance companies in America are “managed and choreographed by men, some of whom are homosexual with many others who
may not be homosexual”, as it is in many other professions (1985, p. 156). The insight offered by Johnston raises a pertinent issue: what is deemed by our culture to be masculine, and is this different from one nation to another. There is some insight to be gained by looking at the research of Geert Hofstede who looked at such dimensions of culture in relation to masculinity and femininity.

3.5.2 Masculinity in national cultures

Hofstede, et al. (1998) introduces the concept of masculinity and femininity as one of the five dimensions of national culture (p. 3). They defines culture as the “collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another” and that national cultures were dominant mental programmes which included things such as “religious beliefs, food preferences, aesthetic choices, to attitudes towards authority” (p. 6). Hofstede, et al. (1998) asserts that masculinity in society requires men to be “assertive, tough, and focussed on material success”, whereas women are supposed to be “tender, modest, and concerned with the quality of life” (p. 6).

Hofstede, et al. constructed a masculinity index, and it is interesting to note that Australia and New Zealand (were ranked 16 and 17 respectively), like the United States (with a rank of 15) and Great Britain (tied with Germany with a rank of 9/10) scored high in the Masculinity Index (1998, p. 9). Their study also determined that men tend to stress “more ego goals” than women, and emphasized that the biological differences between men and women are universal but their “social differences are society specific” (p. 11). Hofstede, et al. (1998), also provide a list of the key differences between masculine and feminine societies, where masculine societies, like those in Australia and New Zealand; are one where (pp. 16-17):

1. The general norm is one where men are supposed to be assertive, ambitious and tough, material success and progress are viewed as important, and sympathy lies with those that are strong.
2. In the family sphere, fathers deal with facts, and mothers with emotions, and boys do not cry; only girls do.

3. In the school, being the best in the school is a coveted ideal and therefore, boys and girls study different subjects.

4. At work, people are seen to live to work and managers are expected to be decisive and assertive (implying managers are male), where equity, mutual competition and performance are stressed, and conflict resolution is by “letting the best man win” and finally,

5. The prevailing societal ideas stress the male prerogative which is the result of religious beliefs.

More importantly, stressed Hofstede, et al., these masculine norms are then transferred to the young child at home within the family, which is further developed and reinforced at schools, in the work place, and even in the “prevailing religious, philosophical, and scientific ideas” (1998, p. 18). It is under these prevailing conditions that all of the respondents I interviewed would have grown up with, in varying degrees.

Hofstede, et al. (1998), also gives a more detailed insight into how culturally constructed gender really is. Gender roles are socialised by the father and mother, and the parent child relationship within the family will ultimately vary across cultures, states Hofstede, et al. (1998). He goes on to state that men’s values differ more in masculine societies that in feminine ones and it is more so for “younger than for older persons” (Hofstede, et al., 1998, p. 77). Gender in the context as used by Hofstede, et al. refers to the distinction “between men and women”, and not that “used for sex” (p. 78). In both Australia and New Zealand, they found that children are controlled by examples set by their parents (Hofstede, et al., 1998, p. 80). In addition, Hofstede, et al., (1998) states, because it is the norm that non dominant parents set an example where the father is tough and deals with facts, the boys in the family learn that they should “assert themselves and not cry” and should “fight
back” when attacked (p. 81). As a result gender roles in the family strongly affect the values relating to what is “appropriate behaviour for boys” (Hofstede, et al., 1998, p. 83).

Hofstede, et al., in their studies also looked at the effect of gender stereotypes in masculine and feminine countries. What is significant in their findings is the fact that in countries with a masculine culture, certain adjectives associated with men and women do take on a judgemental value and hence have connotations of being either good or bad, in most instances, where a man is being referred to using female adjectives, is seen as a sign of derision, and hence prejudice.

In the study by Hofstede, et al., (1998), they also look at sexual behaviour, and they believe that even sexual behaviour is socially constructed, and part of it relates to the national culture dimension of masculinity and femininity discussed earlier. Hofstede, et al. (1998) state that masculine cultures, like in Australia and New Zealand, are “less open about sexual issues”, and homosexuality is a “taboo” issue in such cultures too (p. 154). Sexual norms, particularly the way in which sex is practised and experienced, is also “culturally constructed” relative to other aspects of human life (p. 154). Culturally masculine countries, state Hofstede, et al., continue to show a strong taboo in relation to addressing sexual issues openly, partly in response to the institution of marriage being perceived as being “a holy union” (p. 159).

More importantly, in relation to this study, Hofstede, et al., (1998) found that masculinity is negatively correlated to the acceptance of homosexuality. Their study found that young homosexuals in Australia had more problems accepting their sexual orientation, as a consequence of their societies being homophobic, because homosexuality is felt as “a threat” to masculine norms (p. 167). The issue of homophobia will be taken up again and dealt with in greater detail in a further sub section (3.9.3). What is even more interesting to note about the Australian sample studied is the fact that in Australia, “gender roles in homosexuals has a strong societal component” (p. 167).
3.5.3 Dancing – under different cultures

In the previous section, Hofstede, et al., (1998) elucidated on the cultural perspectives underlying the concepts of masculinity and femininity. In this section, I will review the interview responses of eight male dancers (based on edited transcripts of interviews), that I chose from a selection of dancers who talked about their dancing in a book by Barbara Newman. What is pertinent here is that the eight dancers I selected (for this discussion) from Barbara Newman’s book were selected for a number of different reasons.

First, they came from different national cultural backgrounds, namely, English, European, and North American. Another aspect of culture, was also overlayed to this selection, that of ballet background training and traditions, as they came from the traditions of the Royal Danish Ballet (RDB), Royal Ballet (RB), NYCB, POB, and the Russian traditions (of the Maryinsky Theatre Ballet and the Ballet Russes). These ballet traditions are, to my mind, a form of culture (as defined by Hofstede, et al., (1998), as the collective programming of the mind that sets one a group apart from another) as they provide the cultural context under which these dancers were trained during their formative years.

It is interesting to note that, regardless of their national cultural background and dance training, there were many striking similarities between them. Many made special mention of their early music training, be it with the violin or piano (Newman, 1992a; Newman, 1992c; Newman, 1992e; Newman, 1992g; Newman, 1992h), their early dance teachers (Newman, 1992a; Newman, 1992d; Newman, 1992e) and early training in companies under the various traditions (Newman, 1992c; Newman, 1992f; Newman, 1992g), with two others talking about the influence of the Russians (Newman, 1992b; Newman, 1992c; Newman, 1992e).

All of the selected eight male dancers talked about the strong influence of the training they had with the companies they danced with, and also with that of the choreographers within the companies. Only two of the selected eight talked specifically about choreographing (Newman, 1992e; Newman, 1992g) and surprisingly enough, the same two
men talked of the influence of George Balanchine, where he was Artistic Director during their time at the New York City Ballet.

Serge Lifar and Anatole Vilzak, both born in Russia, but came from quite different traditions. Lifar trained with Bronislava Nijinska (Nijinsky’s sister), and joined the Ballet Russes at age eighteen and at 29 years of age joined POB where he stayed for almost thirty years (Newman, 1992h). Vilzak on the other hand, trained at the Maryinsky Theatre and later taught at the School of American Ballet and San Francisco Ballet School (Newman, 1992a). Lifar talked about learning about art and philosophy while dancing, considered ballet as erotic in its line, and danced with his legs and head, playing out the drama to a “dramatic finale” (Newman, 1992h, p. 27). Vilzak, on the other hand, talked of the learning he did as a member of the corps de ballet literally “looking at every ballet from behind” (Newman, 1992a, p. 15). Vilzak, talked about how important expression in dance was, how rehearsals should be like a performance, and “to do everything and learn everything” (Newman, 1992a, p. 18).

Jean Pierre Bonnefous was born and raised in France, trained at POB School since he was ten years of age and entered the company in 1957 (Newman, 1992e). Jean Pierre cites his teachers as his greatest influence. As a member of the corps de ballet in the company, he would go outside and take class when he did not like the teachers there, but cites the influence of one teacher in particular whom he considered to be “one of the best teachers for male dancers in Paris” (Newman, 1992e, p. 334). He has worked with the choreographers: Maurice Bejart, Roland Petit and George Balanchine. Bejart, he says, choreographs in front of them as he is “preparing the work with the music” (Newman, 1992e, p. 345). Working with Balanchine he says is unique as Balanchine teaches you “to be aware of what the eye can catch” (Newman, 1992e, p. 344). Bonnefous also states that in dance you look at the “quality of the movement”, about weight and “how much you weigh yourself – is important”, as much as being able to act is, and partnering also, which he learned from pas de deux classes at POB (Newman, 1992e, p. 341). Bonnefous is also one of the dancers who choreograph, and for
that he says you must try new and different things and “listen more and more to the audience” (Newman, 1992e, p. 346). Bonnefous joined NYCB in 1970 as principal and left in 1980 (Newman, 1992e).

Niels Bjorn Larsen and Peter Martins are two Danish born dancers who went through the training under the traditions of the Royal Danish School and Ballet. Martins entered the company at age 18 and was later to forge a career at NYCB which he joined in 1967 (Newman, 1992g), whilst Larsen began his career at the School at age 7, graduated into the company at age 20 and became its Artistic Director in 1957 (Newman, 1992f). Martins identifies dancer Erik Bruhn as his greatest influence in dance, and his teacher Stanley Williams as the one “who injected the ballet into my blood” (Newman, 1992g, p. 368). Both men cite their training in the Bourneville tradition at the Royal Danish Ballet (RDB), as critical.

Martins states that they were taught roles very specifically and was “very detailed about every move” (Newman, 1992g, p. 368), whilst Larsen cites his interest in mime (as pantomime came very naturally to him) and was greatly assisted by improvisations sessions he had with the older students at the Ballet (Newman, 1992f). Larsen also states that by getting into the Company, he felt secure financially, but he had to regain all the skills he learned at the school, the importance of music, and that each role is different from the rest and that there was something a dancer needed to think about before dancing the role (Newman, 1992f).

Martins spent a lot of time at NYCB with George Balanchine, cites his influence where he explained his choreography in detail, it made sense, “he fussed with it, he always changed it a little bit, even according to moods” (Newman, 1992g, p. 371). He credits Balanchine with helping him develop character (Newman, 1992g). In terms of his own choreography, Martin says, “I have to rehearse as a dancer myself” (Newman, 1992g, p. 374), and he likes to challenge his dancers and “play with them” (Newman, 1992g, p. 375). More
importantly he feels that dance is about philosophy, and its is deeply rooted in it, and its about learned partnering and “an absolute love for it” (Newman, 1992g, p. 377).

Donald MacLeary and Christopher Gable are both British born, while Desmond Kelly was born in Southern Rhodesia, but all three men have connections with the RB from their early years as students to their professional dancing life (Newman, 1992b; Newman, 1992c; Newman, 1992d). MacLeary claims he was an instinctive dancer who started off wanting to learn highland dancing in his native Scotland, and he used to make up dances whenever he “heard music around the house” (Newman, 1992d, p. 204). He also claims that he was fortunate to have a good teacher “who was a gentleman” with “wonderful manners”, and taught him “presence and manner”, but had to learn partnering from someone else as it did not come naturally to him (Newman, 1992d, p. 204).

In dance, MacLeary states, you need to have a goal and work towards it, and in terms of learning from others he was clear in stating that you need to “steal what was good from every body” – from a walk, to a gesture, and even to the way you get into a position for a pas de deux (Newman, 1992d, p. 205). More importantly, MacLeary believes you must dance with emotion, and that takes courage; and whatever role you undertook “you had to believe in the character” (Newman, 1992d, p. 209) and also that partnering involved “being in harmony mentally” (Newman, 1992d, p. 212).

Kelly and Gable both identified the influence of the Russians on their dancing abilities. Kelly cites the influence of the Russians as they taught how to do things correctly, whilst on a visit to the Festival Ballet in London (Newman, 1992c). Gable identifies the Bolshoi Ballet as “his first major influence” and with them he saw great technique and athletic skills “put to the service of the role” (Newman, 1992b, p. 281). Gable also cites the defection of Rudolf Nureyev to the West as being a turning point in the world of ballet, as “he raised the technical standard” of the dancing required by men, and this made Gable try to increase his speed of execution, his spinning ability, and for a while he did get better at it (Newman,
1992b, p. 282). But, Gable also adds that dancers are a young race, and your career is over by the time you are in your thirties, resulting in you having to “pack it all in while you are still young and physical” (Newman, 1992b, p. 284). Gable himself retired from RB and from dancing at age 27 to pursue acting as a career (Newman, 1992b).

Kelly, who later in life, rejoined the RB New Group with Glen Tetley, had this to say: “every dancer has an ego or else they would not be on stage, and in dancing you make a wonderful discovery that you are able to act” (Newman, 1992, p. 327). This ability to act, he says, is a really lovely feeling to know “you can act...do that role”, and says this most eloquently – “that it’s greater for somebody else to say ‘you moved me tonight’” (Newman, 1992c, p. 327). In summing up, Kelly stated that he enjoyed being versatile in dance, he enjoyed people telling him he was versatile, and more importantly, that he could do “anything he wanted” (Newman, 1992c, p. 329).

The preceeding sections in this literature review, have so far served not only to inform this study, but it is also a means of contextualising the focus of my research study. I see this contextualisation as comprising two components parts. The section just completed I choose to call the macro-context of this research study. I call this the macro-context as it serves to provide, albeit indirectly, the issues overlaying and providing an overview of the research in relation to the social, cultural, and political fields, like the nature of dance education, the training at dance schools, the dance company structure, dancing as a profession for men, masculinity in a cultural context, and what accomplished dancers say about dancing. Although important, they are at the periphery and bounding the main focus of our study, the dancer/choreographers.
3.6 RESEARCH on DANCE and DANCERS

Before proceeding on to what I call the micro-context or those issues that directly affect the respondents interviewed, I would like to take some time here to review some of the other research I have found in the diverse areas relating to my research study.

3.6.1 Differentiating other research

I found little evidence of research specifically relating to or covering the areas that impinge on my research study. My study aims to look specifically at non-heterosexual male dancer/choreographers. Much has been written about male dancers per se, especially about Vaslav Nijinsky and Rudolf Nureyev, but many were in the form of (auto)biographies and a diary (Buckle, 1998; Nijinsky, 1999; Solway, 1998; Soutar, 2006; Watson, 1994), and I did not feel I needed to add to this wealth of knowledge. Much has also been written about dance companies like the Ballet Russes (Garafola, 1989). But, very few make any formal attempts to study and relate the critical events, and the consequent life decisions that are made as a result, in relation to their careers.

A number of studies were undertaken during the 1990s to study gay men and women in their professions, especially that of the corporate world. These studies looked particularly at what it was like to be gay in corporate America and how business attitudes were changing as a result (Stewart, 1991; Woods & Lucas, 1993). Signorile (1997) looked at what it meant to be a gay man in the 1990s, whilst Savin-Williams (1998) looked at how young gay men learned to adopt a sexual identity, and Siegel and Lowe (1995) looked specifically at the life passages of gay men in terms of the developmental psychology of male homosexuality. Signorile, Savin-Williams, and Siegel and Lowe all undertook their research as psychological studies of gay men and homosexuality. This study is not intended to have such a psychological focus, but I did use these studies as the basis from which I formulated my interview questions for the respondents.
3.6.2 Research on dance, masculinity, and sexuality

I must draw attention to the works of Ramsay Burt (1994, 1995, 2000), who looks specifically at dance in relation to sexual identity, specifically at issues surrounding that of the male dancer in terms of masculinity and sexuality. Burt’s works asserts quite strongly in favour of the concept that gender is socially constructed, which was one of his main emphases (1994, 1995). McAvoy (2002) also considers the socially constructed dimension of gender, in relation to what she calls the taboo of the male ballet dancer. McAvoy echoes Burt’s ideas, but also looks at the issues of stereotyping and homophobia and its effects in dance, by considering four different case studies (2002).

I found other related studies that looked at the reasons why people participate in dance (Alter, 1997; Bailey & Oberschneider, 1997; Nieminen, 1998). Alter (1997) looked at why dance students (dance majors) pursue dance in an American college context. She asks these college dance students to identify the reasons for their choice of a dance career, which is distinctly different for the respondents I interviewed, who were for all intents and purposes, from Alter’s point of view, “conservatory dance students” and these college students did not only pursue dance but also actively participated in several other arts or art forms (Alter, 1997, p. 79). Of her students in the study who pursued choreography, many loved doing it, but found it quite “difficult, frustrating and made them feel insecure and vulnerable” (Alter, 1997, p. 81). Nieminen’s (1998) work is distinguished here because it is culturally specific in two ways, namely: it was conducted in Finland, and it focussed on folk dancers who were non-professionals. Despite these cultural differences, Nieminen (1998) states that although “dancers share experiences, meanings and motives which unite them as a group”, there are also differences among them in the different dance forms (p. 68). As a result of these issues, it is incumbent upon dance educators and researchers, states Nieminen, to consider “dance form, age, gender, breadth of instructional background, persistence, intensity of dancing, and
expectations of future involvement, as well as, the demands, expectations and values of social culture” (1998, p. 68).

Bailey and Oberschneider (1997) looked at sexual orientation in professional dance. This particular work encompasses the concept of sexual orientation in the professional dance world. I found this work critically informed my research, despite the fact that it employed a psychological approach and methodology. Bailey and Oberschneider (1997) investigated the validity of the stereotype of the male dancer being a gay man, and also looked to find if there was any relationship “between sexual orientation and membership in particular occupations”, and if there was, what was the reason for its occurrence, and what impact it had on the other non-homosexual members of the occupation (p. 1). What was interesting, stated Bailey and Oberschneider, was that the reasons why gays (homosexuals) participate in the performing arts can be explained as “psychological and sociological” (1997, p. 2). It is interesting to note that the sampling technique they utilised were from “personal contacts, a solicitation in a dance magazine and snowball sampling” (Bailey & Oberschneider, 1997, p. 3), of which, the first and third methods were the ones I employed in my research.

What they found from their research is that “only one male, out of the forty two sampled and interviewed”, believed that his experiences in dance had a major influence on his sexual orientation (Bailey & Oberschneider, 1997, p. 6). Furthermore, it was the psychological factors, more so than the sociological factors had a greater influence on choice of occupation, and these factors were: that gay men dance in order to be feminine (they dance because women do, and this question I put to my respondents during their interviews), that male sexual orientation is most often determined early “by adolescence, and is not susceptible to influence by later experiences” and that the high percentage of gay male dancers did not have any detrimental effect on the other non–homosexual (heterosexual) men in dance (Bailey & Oberschneider, 1997, p. 9). Their results are closely mirrored by the results of this research study (see Chapter 6).
3.6.3 Dancers and identity development

Earl’s (1988) study had a very strong influence and had both a direct and indirect influence on the direction and focus of my study. It informed my research as his research looked particularly at male dancers, and also looked at the psychological and sociological development of male dancers – especially North American male dancers. It is from Earl’s model of personal identity acquisition that I based a large portion of my interview questions. It provided a useful framework on which to hang the different questions I asked of the respondents.

Earl (1988) states that his study is an attempt at understanding the motivation and achievement “within a particular class of performer namely those who invest their lives in the execution of a physical repertory to be performed before a paying public (p. ix) with the express purpose of using it to serve as role models as well as “fodder for belief systems with regard to development and achievement” (p. x). Earl cites Balanchine and Nijinsky as powerful figures, because of their individual and separate choices that each of them made in terms “to the life sequence tasks, as much as for their contribution to dance” (1988, p. x). What was also very useful for my study was the fact that Earl’s (1988) study focussed on a population of male ballet dancers, but just as critical, was the study of the motivation and adaptive skills as well as the “psychological configurations that came to bear on these individuals” (p. x).

Earl (1988), through his study sought to achieve three goals. Of the three, one was consistent with what I was trying to achieve in part by my research, which was establishing a framework of understanding what Earl calls the “vocational identity acquired through the ritualistic repetition of seemingly unrelated tasks” (Earl, 1988, p. xi). The other two goals are where our studies are divergent. Earl (1988) was looking at dancers’ behaviour from the point of view as being obsessive and an obsession, where he sampled a number of practising professional with a view to showing some link between the “physical performance of exacting
material and neurotic (or obsessive) behaviour” (p. xi). Earl also sought to look at motivation theory and how these physical performers invalidate some of these ideas, but raises “a more enduring notion of social learning in the physically exceptional” world in which they exist (1988, p. xi).

Earl states that the “movement of the male dancer from student, through performing experiences and on (for some) to independent creativity in the role of choreographer, is one yet to be studied” (1988, p. xii). In addition, a limited amount of scholarship focuses on the experiences of gay men and boys in dance education states Hamilton (1999), despite the fact that “recent research in the United States indicates that gay and bi-sexual men comprise half the male population in dance” (Risner, 2002, p. 63).

In the last two statements, I found the focus for my study, and to some degree I found some evidence for the need for my research, hence, giving a sense of legitimacy to pursuing this line of research. What is key and the central focus in Earl’s research, is the study of personal identity formation and acquisition, in terms of the processes individuals go through for the “unity, consistency and continuity” of the individuals perception of himself (1988, p. 2). He goes on to states that this process is not carried out in isolation, but is subject to social influences, as a person’s identity is dependent “upon the acknowledgement and support provided by significant others within their social context” (Earl, 1988, p. 2).

The model of identity acquisition Earl (1988) argues in favour of, which I have used for framing my interview questions, involves four stages namely: the symbiotic stage or “the primary experience”, the egocentric stage which relate to “those experiences relating to self trust and differentiation”, the sociocentric-objectivistic stage where there is “interaction with social dynamics”, and finally, the universalistic stage where we have the “generalisation of personal and social skills into a life pattern” (p. 3).

The symbiotic stage is the first stage in the development of the individual’s ego and has a symbiotic relationship with caretakers and care givers and the environment, and this
nurturing of the individual, in which both “heredity and experience become important” in forming the personality of the child, as well as “probabilities for success” within certain segments of society, stated Earl (1988, p. 4).

The second stage or egocentric stage is one where the child is able to differentiate itself from the environment it lives in, albeit this happens at the perceptual level, it is at this stage where children begin to understand and “feel unusual or different from the other members of the family” (Earl, 1988, p. 5). There can be no question that male ballet dancers would feel this way at this stage (Earl’s study found 78% of those interviewed felt this way), and undoubtedly more so if they were gay male ballet dancers, resulting in their “feeling and assumptions of uniqueness” (1988, p. 5). This feeling, in concert with rather rigid father figures, could result in boys developing and adopting styles of behaviour that try to avoid “shame and disgrace” (Earl, 1988, p. 11). By running away from home physically or leaving to join a ballet school in some ways affords the boy a chance to “reclaim control of his world” and a sense of “personal value”, stated Earl (1988, p. 12). It is not uncommon therefore for many young men at this stage to “perceive himself potentially as homosexual” (Earl, 1988, p. 13).

In the sociocentric-objectivistc stage of ego development, a personal identity formerly based on “bodily capacity” is now transformed into an identity based on role performance, where a youth becomes aware of a sense of where he does or does not fit in, in social situations (Earl, 1988, p. 16). It is here at this stage states Earl (1988), where the “concept of role” separates them as much as “their selective experience”, and therefore, a child who is not athletic will begin to turn to his artistic abilities in a regular way such that it begins to reinforce his “personal sense of accomplishment” (p. 17). It is at this stage that most American males begin to discover ballet (Earl, 1988), and it also at this stage that the male dancer becomes aware of desires and drives (in adolescence) and will seek for “physical
perfection and achievement”, resulting in much comparing being done with other dancers and non-dancing peers (Earl, 1988, p. 18).

In the final stage, the universalistic stage, if successfully achieved stated Earl (1988), result in the identity of the individual being transformed from that of role identity to ego identity (p.18). It is at this stage where the male dancer begins to “identify himself as a dancer” (p. 19). All these characteristics of the different stages of ego development were taken into account in the formulation of interview questions.

### 3.7 DANCE and GENDER


#### 3.7.1 Gender and masculinity as a social construct

Connell (2000) focusses on the study of men in terms of gender and masculinity. Edgar (1998) on the other hand researched the shift in “social expectations” as to what “a normal male” should do (p. x), and what this does in relation to “marriage, the family and gender differences” (p. xv), by stating first the generalist view that the true value of a man is in his ability and capacity to “create a companionable, sharing marriage and father children in an intimate and loving way” (p. xvi). Both authors take a distinctly Australian perspective in their research.

Edgar (1998) explores the issues of manhood and masculinity in rather graphic language. Edgar (1998) states, most men measure manhood in terms of their “capacity for penetrative sex”, and if they have sex with other men, they are seen as homosexual or “not normal” (p. 5), but more importantly, that being masculine is not the same “as being male”,

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and that “sex and sexual difference” underlies the basis of most gender interactions, resulting in the concept of masculinity being socially constructed (p. 6). In Ancient Greek culture, which is a macho male culture, “homosexual relations between adolescent boys or between boys and their older mentors, was seen as part of their sexual education” and not as perverse (Edgar, 1998, p. 7).

In modern Australian culture, men are terrified of being called a “poofter, a fairy” or even “gay” as it has negative connotations (Edgar, 1998, p. 8). The term homosexual was first used “as far back as 1869” (McAvoy, 2002, p. 2) to describe what was then called a “third sex who could not help their proclivity and who could not therefore be condemned”, which is today still being used to assert a genetic predisposition towards homosexuality (Edgar, 1998, p. 9). McAvoy (2002) states that homosexuality is a social construction of our own culture, even of our own century (p. 2). But, with the current growth of homosexual behaviour, as a result of the loosening of the structures against any form of sexual pleasure, homosexuality is becoming accepted as a legitimate form of sexual behaviour (Edgar, 1998, p. 9). Society has changed, and so has its views on sex and of sexuality.

Edgar (1998) asserts categorically that “gender is learned difference” and is based on social learning and situational reinforcement, not socio-biology or innate psychological differences (p. 12), and that boys and girls are exposed to vastly different situations from birth, and are reinforced everyday by the exclusive “male-female structures of society” which in turn limit their exposure to each other’s world (p. 13). Research on sex roles confirm that there are virtually no differences between men and women on “any psychological trait, mental ability, physical capacity or attitude” but rather sex roles are a set of expectations “supposed to derive from our biological sex” (Edgar, 1998, p. 29) or from the “necessary functions society requires to operate efficiently” (Connell, 2000, p. 7).

Edgar (1998) also locates masculinity in Australian terms. He says, they are associated with power, possession and control, are aligned with the control of resources,
money, property, the means of violence and social control, and that even “the language of power is gendered in masculine terms” (Edgar, 1998, p. 33). This gender specific socialisation is further applied in schools: in the selection of subjects as suitable for boys and girls and even more so in the playground and in school sports, where “the physical setting is set up in ways that exacerbate the gender differences” and sports becomes the “proving grounds” of masculinity (Edgar, 1998, p. 47). The media, states Edgar (1998), still plays a significant role in defining “appropriate masculinity in any real life situation” (p. 54), and whatever the choice, “young people probably learn as much about what it means to be a man from such programmes in the media as they do from their fathers” or other adult males in the extended family (p. 57).

Connell (2000) expresses similar sentiments in that what we define as masculine is also subject to “reinforcement from society at large” (p. 11). Connell (2000) identifies masculinities as being “defined collectively in culture”, and sustained in and by institutions and that institutions may construct “multiple masculinities and define relationships between them” (p. 11). Connell (2000) in distinguishing his work states he believes that” masculinities are not programmed into our genes or genetic makeup, nor fixed by social structure, prior to social interaction”, but that they come into being or “are actively produced” as people act, and they use “the resources and strategies” available in any given social setting (p. 12).

Connell (2000) cites what he calls the “gender relations (or relational) approach”, which provides us with a better understanding of the “structures of gender, the relationship between bodies and society”, and what he calls the “patterning of gender” (pp. 23-24). Connell (2000) suggested finally that gender is symbolically represented through “dress, make up, body culture, gesture, tone” and even in our communication through “grammatical and syntactical rules and visual and sound vocabularies” (p. 26).

Large social institutions, like the state, the workplace and the schools are all play a part in the configuration of gender and are “substantially gendered” (Connell, 2000, p. 28).
These institutions are also responsible for gender patterning regimes whereby most educational authority is in masculine hands; parts of the curriculum are the same, especially in sports, also in peer group life and dating rituals (Connell, 2000). Connell (2000) states that these regimes together with the “gender patterning of culture and personal life” result in the gender order of society (p. 29).

Masculinity, as gender practise is therefore: a social construction, referring to male bodies is “not determined by male biology”, but institutionalised in structure of society and is “an aspect of individual character or personality” (Connell, 2000, p. 29). More importantly, states Connell (2000), what used to be called the “male role” is not the only role, as there are others and we need to understand the differences and the relations between “different patterns” such as “subordinated masculinities”, the most important of which is “gay masculinity” (p. 30) which is a secondary focus of this research.

### 3.7.2 Gender and masculinity as psychological construct

McAvoy (2002) and Burt (1994, 1995, 2001) look at the construction of masculinity from the point of view as it is represented, and its implications, in dance. McAvoy (2002) calls the male ballet dancer “something of a taboo in the western world” (p. 1). Any male child, aged six, undergoing ballet training; will be fully aware of the “compromising and sometimes unhappy situation” in a ballet class (McAvoy, 2002, p. 1), which was the subject of the film *Billy Elliot* (Brenman, Finn & Daldry, 2000).

The movie *Billy Elliot* was based on a true life story of Philip Mosley (Sciolino, 2001) a dancer at the RB (at the time the film was released), and it showed that the dual roles of being a dancer and being masculine are not necessarily incompatible or competing ideas and/or concepts. This film tells the story of a young male dancer who “follows his passions despite financial hardship and societal stereotypes” (Sciolino, 2001, p. 2). This film made a successful attempt at trying to break the traditional stereotypes often associated with male ballet dancers and even made “male ballet dancers more acceptable” (Sciolino, 2001, p. 3).
Stereotypes are nothing but a “crude set of mental representations of the world”, but they are insidious in that they do play a part in shaping the way we perceive others and also the way we behave towards them (McAvoy. 2002, p. 3). Albright (1997) states the film makes us “consider how we popularly think about dance and how dance contributes to the construction of cultural identity, understood as ‘how one’s body renders meaning in society’” (p. xxiii). As is the case in most western societies, anything that is different is seen as being “negative, dysfunctional and somehow basically wrong” (McAvoy, 2002, p. 3).

Burt (1994) states that what it takes to be masculine involves being rational and unemotional, as men are “less able to deal with or express the full range of emotions”, and will hence avoid doing so, they are denied the opportunities to “get in touch with their bodies” and therefore they are strong “social pressures for men not to dance” (pp. 110). This sense of unease relates to what Burt calls the “avoidance of bodily display” but also to the “unease at how men are looked at on stage when dancing” (1994, p. 124), which is a result of the formation of identity (gender and sexuality) being a result of “psychological, social and cultural processes and also through relational experiences” (p. 125). Masculinity is “constructed” (as opposed to being innate) and it is also “relational” (rather than essential) (Burt, 1994, p. 127).

Burt (1995) asserts that the masculine identity is a “psychological construct” (p. 14). Burt (1995) states that ideology operates at both the conscious and unconscious level therefore the “formation of identity” is a psychological process, and is most salient at the “early stages of the development of gendered identity” (p. 14). Burt also identifies that the processes through which the gendered identity is formed, is linked between an individual’s “psychological, social and cultural experiences” (p. 14). What is experienced by a male (boy) is underlined by his “bodily difference” (Burt, 1995, p. 15). It is believed, states Burt (1995), this “sense of the boundaries of the body begin to develop along with the beginnings of individual identity” (p. 15).
Chodorow (1979) states that “a boy must learn his gender identity as being not–female”, and “learning what it is to be masculine is also defined as being not–feminine or not–womanly (p. 1). This differentiation and separation relies on the “importance of the mother figure” and the fact that “mothering is, in our society, almost exclusively done by women” such that “when a child develops a sense of separateness, this is formed in relation to the female body” (Burt, 1995, p. 15). “Boys and men come to deny the feminine identification within themselves and those feelings they experienced as feminine: feelings of dependence, relational needs, emotionally general” (Chodorow, 1979, p. 1).

This sense of what is masculine is in part “environmental, socially and historically contingent” and because power sits historically and socially with the male, this then becomes central to the understanding of sexual difference between men and women (Burt, 1995). As a result, men are better able (stronger) at “repressing these strongly experienced developmental conflicts” (Burt, 1995, p. 17). With such pressures on boys and men to be tough and insensitive, they are denied opportunities to get in touch with themselves and their bodies, thus making “a boy or a male wanting to dance very problematic” (Burt, 1995, p. 19). Burt (2001) adds “because the body is gendered, dancing continually redefines and contests the individual’s knowledge of the limits of gendered behaviour and sexuality” (p. 220) but, “a gay male point of view need not necessarily be an exclusive one, nor one that is necessarily adopted by all men who have sex with other men” (p. 211). This brings us to the next issue of sexual identity.

3.8 DANCE and SEXUAL IDENTITY

In the sections to follow, I will address what I call the micro-contextual issues. These issues relate directly to the respondents themselves. I will consider the issues that relate specifically to, and have a direct impact on, the development of the sexual identity of the respondents. In doing so, I consider the issues of the development of sexual identity (within gay men) up to adulthood, the strategies gay men employ to cope with their sexual identity,
their ‘coming out’ (to society at large as a gay person) process, and finally, the issues that relate after their internalisation of their gay identity, that is, what happens after they self-identify as gay men and the impact that has on their future lives after that point of self identification. This latter section will also address the impact their self identification as gay male dancer/choreographers and what effects this has had on their dance or dancing and/or choreographing careers.

3.8.1 Growing up as gay men

In Section 3.6.3, I looked at, assessed and reviewed, the research of Earl (1988) who focussed on the issues relating to life cycle stage development among male dancers in the USA. It was essentially a psychological study, which applied a “four stage development model”, to male dancers in socio-cultural context of USA (Earl, 1988, p. 3). I will now shift the focus and look at research undertaken on the issues relating to life cycle stage development, this time among gay men. Siegel and Lowe (1995), Savin-Williams (1998) and Peacock (2000) all focus their research on life cycle development stages amongst gay men in the USA. Their research is distinguished from that of Earl’s 1988 work, in that their psychological studies focus solely on gay men.

Siegel and Lowe in their research, employ a three stage development process, which they label as “turning points, coming out, and maturing” (1995, p. 32). Savin-Williams (1998) on the other hand, employed a different model in his research, with an emphasis on what he calls “developmental milestones, transition or turning points” towards his respondents’ acquisition of “same sex identity and status” (p. 4). Peacock’s (2000) research is distinguished from Siegel and Lowe and that of Savin-Williams, as he focussed on the developmental issues of men who “self-acknowledged their homosexuality” (p. 19) later in their life (in their 30s or later).

Siegel and Lowe (1995) identify a three stage model with the turning points stage being characterised by pre-emergence issues, self-acknowledgement, and self-identification
(p. 32). The pre-emergence stage sees the young homosexual understanding that his same sex feelings “violate institutionalised prejudices” (p. 51), and sees his well-being as dependent upon how “other people perceive who he is or what he might become” (p. 53). It is also at this stage that every child goes through a “stage of feeling different and he then internalises the view and begins to feel really different and becomes uncomfortable with it” (Siegel & Lowe, 1995, pp. 54-55). When the child discovers a definition for his feeling, and becomes certain of his feelings of differentness, this may often result in feelings of “inadequacy, inferiority, humiliation, guilt and shame and begin to feel he has failed his family” (Siegel & Lowe, 1995, pp. 56-57). Siegel and Lowe (1994) state that boys at this stage do not think of sex play as “masculine or feminine” (p. 63), neither are they aware of the “gender rules and distinctions” (p. 63), but as a result of strong “family, ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds” (p. 60), these boys begin to long not just for sexual release and solace, but also for “affection and solace” (p. 63). The “suppression of information” about gays keeps gays from learning “about themselves and their counterparts in the communities” (Siegel & Lowe, 1995, p. 66).

In the next stage of self-acknowledgement, the person begins to know quite well “what the word homosexual means” and “acknowledges the nature of his differentness” by making visits to various gay locations and locales and understands his differentness is related to same sex attraction (Siegel & Lowe, 1995, pp. 76-77). This stage is also followed by the first romance and it is not uncommon for boys to look to older men to show them what it means to be gay, albeit an initiation or transition, or “rite of passage” to adulthood (p. 79), usually occurring between the “age of thirteen to eighteen” (p. 82).

The next stage of self-identification can be a difficult stage to overcome as we are all conditioned to believe all the stereotypes generated in society, so to “avoid being sanctioned” we all play roles, like “the dutiful son or father” (Siegel & Lowe, 1995, pp. 96-97). To overcome all these, the self-identifying gay male must be able “to confront and recognise”
others may see him as “deviant”, adjust to society’s rejection, and to adjust his own self-loathing, and accept the loss of “the safe, heterosexual blueprint” (p. 99). For him to accept his self-identity depends on how much information there is available about homosexuality for him; the more positive the information, “the greater the possibility for openness and tolerance” (Siegel & Lowe, 1995, p. 100).

The next stage in Siegel and Lowe (1995) model is called “coming out”, or the rites of passage into gay adulthood; and this transition takes place in three distinct phases (p. 113). Siegel and Lowe’s first phase involves assuming a homosexual identity by acknowledging these homosexual feelings in private. This stage of coming out involves the unlearning and the deliberate “deconstructing of irrelevant cultural ideas” as much as the learning of new rules and roles for a homosexual male (Siegel & Lowe, 1995, p. 125).

The second phase in this stage, states Siegel and Lowe (1995) is about “accepting one’s own homosexuality” (p. 32) by making a “debut into small groups of other gays” and a form of coming out in public (p. 113). The acceptance of one’s own sexuality requires not only the eradication of all the “irrelevant religious, moral and ethical constructs” but also involves allowing and permitting the male to “claim another piece of his sexual identity” through each sexual encounter, thereby abandoning the “irrelevant restrictions, suppositions, fears and judgements” imposed by the predominantly heterosexual world (Siegel & Lowe, 1995, p. 131). It is also at this stage that the homosexual male, will begin to develop a sense of “personal attractiveness and sexual competence” to some level or degree of intensity (p. 132), and to form a “concentric circle of friends” who function more like a family as their blood relatives would have at this stage (p. 144). It is at this stage states Siegel and Lowe (1995) that the male begins to identify with who he is and where he belongs and begins to lead a legitimate gay life (p. 157), and starts to search out his new family to which he chooses to belong to voluntarily (p. 160). The final phase in Siegel and Lowe’s (1995) second stage is about celebrating that self-expression (of being gay) (p. 32) by publicly “confronting
prejudice and bigotry” (p. 114) and to finally confront the fears by telling your parents about your sexual self and to affect a change in society by becoming a positively confident gay man (p. 174).

The third and final stage in Siegel and Lowe’s model is the maturity stage involving “re-evaluation and renewal, and finally mentoring” (1995, p.32). It is at this stage that the homosexual male personally and publicly identifies as a single image that of a gay male and an emerging adult gay man and this period of deep self-reflection and self-evaluation usually occurs from the “age of 30 onwards” (1995, p. 186). The final phase in this stage is the mentoring stage, where gay men not only mentor other gay men professionally, but also nurture them, which for all intents and purposes involves “emotional caretaking” (Siegel & Lowe, 1995, p. 226).

Savin-Williams (1998) use young men’s stories in his research as it is his belief that the best way to understand people is “to understand their stories” (p. 1), which is what I used in my research. Savin-Williams (1998) also adopts the use of “turning points” whereby he gets the youth to report on dramatic or unexpected events that transform their life courses (p. 7), while I use the term critical events. Savin-Williams (in his research) operates from the belief that “sexual-minority individuals have distinctive yet common life courses” as a result of the special mix of “biological (personal), psychological, social and cultural factors” (1998, p. 9).

I have taken these factors into consideration when conducting my research. My research is distinguished from the work of Savin-Williams in that I do not use youths as respondents. Nonetheless, the research by Savin-Williams (1998) is worthy of consideration because he makes a distinction between, and provides a definition of, what he calls “sexual orientation and sexual identity” (p. 3).

I believe this distinction is important. Sexual orientation is defined as “preponderance of sexual or erotic feelings, thoughts or fantasies, and/or behaviours one has for members of
one’s sex or the other, both or neither” (Savin-Williams, 1998, p. 3) implying a biological and/or psychological truth. Sexual Identity on the other hand is defined as the “enduring self recognition of the meaning that sexual feelings, attraction and behaviours have for one’s sense of self. This sense of self occurs within the pool of potential sexual identities that are defined and given meaning by the cultural and historic time in which one lives” (Savin-Williams, 1998) which therefore implies it is a historically and culturally located social construct.

Savin-Williams (1998) states that although an individual’s life course (trajectory as he calls it) is unique, there are common life courses among “individuals who share personal characteristics” (p. 9). Savin-Williams views the developmental process of comprising eight steps and he also states that few of the respondents viewed their lives “as following a linear progression from one developmental milestone to the next” (1998, p. 231). Savin-Williams (1998) identified a model of developmental progression (of eight stages) related to turning points in the lives of these youth and they are when:

1. They become aware of same sex attractions, labelling those attractions as homosexual, and having same sex and other sex encounters, which in terms of Siegel and Lowe’s (1994) model is called “Turning Points” (p. 32).

2. They start labelling themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual, disclosing this information to another, and developing a same sex relationship, which is called “Coming Out” by Siegel and Lowe, (1995, p. 32).

3. They start disclosing to a family member, and develop a sense of being gay, which in Siegel and Lowe’s term is called “Maturing” (1995, p. 32).

It is clear from the above that Siegel and Lowe’s (1995) research model of the development process closely mirrors that employed by Savin-Williams (1998), so it would be duplication to consider the latter model.

Peacock’s (2000) research is significant as it deals with how older gay men coped with the idea of coming out much later in life. Peacock (2000) looks at how gay men who come
out (self identify as being gay) later in life (in their thirties or later) cope with these two stages of development:” identity versus role confusion”, which usually takes place in adolescence, and “intimacy versus isolation”, which is usually expected to take place during adulthood (p. 14). What occurred for this group of respondents was the fact that they had “not yet developed their gay identity” but due to social pressure “continued with their surface development regarding socially prescribed roles” (Peacock, 2000, p. 19), because their identity versus role confusion were not resolved, a false development ensued and they lived as if they were two men in one body, “a gay man and a non-gay man” (Peacock, 2000, p. 20).

For many of these men society required them to marry, so many did, some as a result of their “emotional feelings”, whilst others as an attempt to “hide or cure their emotional feelings for members of the same sex” (Peacock, 2000, p. 20). Peacock (2000) states that, the marriages “resulted in secrecy and covert behaviour” resulting in lower self-image, dishonesty, isolation and social anxiety which often led to undermining their self-esteem and self-efficacy, ultimately resulting in divorce (p. 21).

In shedding their old selves, these men were finally able to address both their identity and intimacy issues by “entering a new culture” where they would learn how to live as a gay person (Peacock, 2003, p. 23). Present society on the one hand could be very “ageist, promiscuous, and focussing on appearance”, but on the other hand afforded these men a “greater sense of freedom within the gay culture” (Peacock, 2000, p. 23). What Peacock (2000) found with this cohort of men is that they had the ability to choose what they liked about gay life, and discard those with which they could not identify with, thus “solving the identity versus role confusion issue” (p. 24).

In terms of finding intimacy, these men had to find a form of balance, some who were lucky, found someone to share their lives with, others in finding their new identity became promiscuous, as a direct result of spending all those years “feeling isolated before coming out” (Peacock, 2000, p. 25). For many, the temptation to remain unfaithful is present and
acted upon, even after a long term relationship, because the acceptance of sexual relations without commitment is rife in today’s society “as a consequence of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s” (Peacock, 2003, p. 26). They are thus subject to the same issues and consequences as any other gay men coming to terms with their identity as gay adult men, the difference being that they get to go through these issues with a greater degree of experience and maturity.

In citing my own research, I have adapted, incorporated, and expanded on the modes and models of inquiry used by Earl (1988), Peacock (2000), Savin-Williams (1998), and Siegel and Lowe (1995) on a number of different levels. My research study looks at life cycle development stages issues and its impact on men (males), who are both gay and who are dancers. My study also extends the aforementioned research by applying it to the socio-cultural context of Australia and New Zealand. It is with this fact that my study is characteristically different, and hence, distinguished from the others.

3.8.2 Dealing with isolation and immigration

Tacey (1997) asserts that adolescence for today’s children begin much earlier and also last longer, and as a consequence, many of these (gay) adolescents are likely to sustain more abuse and negative treatment, and as long as they are made to feel “alienated and separate” from society’s norms, they are “likely to hit out at what they feel excludes them” (p. 128). Peacock (2000), Savin-Williams (1998) and Siegel and Lowe (1995) all identify the fact that many of these young men going through their coming out or rites of passage feel a sense of apartness, of being different and separate from the others, and this consequent sense of isolation can sometime lead to these young men moving away from their home or home environment, to immigrate somewhere more supportive of their difference. This section therefore presents a discussion of the issues of isolation and immigration which many gay and lesbian youth and adults face as a result of their adopting their gay sexual identity.
Gunn (1997) states English gays (both men and women) who leave home to seek people like themselves, and “tend to gravitate to the large cities” like London where they can “hide themselves and create their own world” (p. v). They are constantly looking out for communities that can help to “validate their group identity” and also one that enables them to cherish their sexuality” (Cant, 1997, p. 1), allowing them to make friends, find sexual partners, and “to participate in social and political groups” without having to “justify their sexuality” or to police their behaviour as they once did (Cant, 1997, p. 2). It affords them the opportunity to be themselves, who they are, and start the process of acknowledging the “enforced isolation” of their youth and the impact that has had on their “whole personal development” (Cant, 1997, p. 7). Some others, as a result of their race and religion, feel as if they are “exiles within their communities” regardless of whether they come out or not (Cant, 1997, p. 11), bringing them towards an understanding and appreciation of the nature of “isolation and belonging” (Cant, 1997, p. 13).

Shakespeare (1997) spent much of his early life travelling with his parents and then later went to boarding school, but found his life shuttling between two identities, “family life and school life, neither of which he fit into successfully” (p. 31). His first real home was at Cambridge where he went to University and returned to later in life “as a gay and disabled (restricted growth – achondroplasia) man and single parent” (Shakespeare, 1997, p. 31). His geographical migration coincided with his migration into a gay community identity which also enabled him to be one personally involved in “disability politics” (Shakespeare, 1997, p. 32).

Nacho (1997) while at school, was very miserable as a result of the label of “poofter” which was for him very painfully ostracising (p. 59) and a result, created within himself, feelings of “self-denial and self-hatred” (p. 60). After attending an English language course in Bournemouth at fourteen years of age, Nacho discovered sex, but his many attempts to be normal (heterosexual) failed (1997, p. 62). His first gay romance also helped him with his
self-identity as a gay man, he “lost weight and made himself gorgeous” and also went through the process of breaking up with his girlfriend in Spain (Nacho, 1997, p. 63). The atmosphere of London was what he needed to help him “express his own sexuality” (Nacho, 1997, p. 64). Nacho’s and Shakespeare’s experiences are those of two foreign men who came to London to become gay and stayed there.

Blachford (1997) states his first migration occurred at eight years of age when he was moved to a gifted class, where “sensitive types” like him learned from a “rather eccentric teacher” (1997, p. 135). His second migration involved him moving away from home to attend Queens University in Kingston, in Ottawa, Canada, and it was during his time at Queens when he was first confronted with his own gay self “when a visiting friend came out to him” (Blachford, 1997, p. 137). He later followed this up with a visit to Toronto’s only gay discotheque in 1970, and for the rest of his time at University he investigated much of the gay life close by “allowing myself some time and space to sort out my feelings about being gay” (Blachford, 1997, p. 138).

Blachford found himself in Sydney in 1972, and got himself involved with radical politics in the form of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) (Blachford, 1997, p. 139). London was his next stop and it became his home for many years, and it was in London where he cites himself as “developing intellectually, emotionally, politically and physically” (Blachford, 1997, p. 140), but left it to teach in Germany, and then finally returned again in 1981, to participate in the Gay Switchboard and the London Gay Teenage group (Blachford, 1997, p. 142). Blachford (1997) finally left London to go to Montreal to establish a relationship (p. 142). Blachford spent his entire life emigrating from one country to another, but, eventually returned home to Canada.

Southey (1997), Jones (1997) and Smith (1997), migrated to London to live as openly gay men. Jones (1997) born and raised in North Wales, saw his way out of farming (as he was allergic to sheep) by becoming educated (p. 117). Jones (1997) was presented with an
opportunity to study in London at seventeen, he took it, and it was during this time that he
discovered the Goth scene, the night club scene, sex, drugs and alcohol, all the things not to
be had in a little Welsh town (p. 120). He has this to say about gay life: “for me it is also
important to be accepted by society as an individual while never denying one’s sexuality”
(Jones, 1997, p. 121).

Southey (1997) moved to London to be a teacher, a trade unionist and carer for people
with AIDS, whilst Smith (1997) migrated to London where he works as a volunteer with the
London Gay and Lesbian Switchboard and also assists with caring for people with AIDS.
Southey’s (1997) upbringing in a mining town meant he never spent much time with his
father, but in fact spent most of his time with women, his mother, his grandmother and friends
who were mostly women, as he “found boys and men too cold and hard” (pp. 48-49). He was
the first person in his family to go to secondary school, and was having sex with other boys
since his early teens but attached very little sexual identity to it as “it was what everybody
did” (Southey, 1997, p. 50). He attended Lancaster University and it was during those days
that he got involved with radical politics by associating with the GLF, as Blachford (1997)
did. After four years at Lancaster, Southey (1997) moved to London mainly because he knew
many people from the GLF in Lancaster who had also moved down into the city (p. 52) and
became heavily involved in gay politics through the Labour Party, and it was here that he
became aware of the “depth and variety of prejudice against lesbians and gays” (p. 54) and
wanted to work towards combating this. He is now an openly gay teacher, involved in labour
politics, is a trade unionist, and also cares for people with AIDS, all the things that he would
not have been able to do in his small mining town home (Southey, 1997, p. 55).

Smith (1997) was raised on a small farm in Perthshire, Scotland. Smith was aware,
right from a very early age, that he was different from the other boys and probably thought
that “he was a sissy” (1997, p. 176). Smith studied hard at school until when puberty hit and
sexuality started to affect his life in more direct ways, like experimenting with sex with both
boys and girls, and as result his studies suffered greatly (1997, p. 179). His first job was with a local bank, and after transferring to a branch in Dundee, Scotland, and having attended training courses in Glasgow and Edinburgh, Smith (1977) was able to meet with other gay people. He was now able to move towards “identifying with a gay identity”, which he had spent a bulk of his post puberty life thinking about (Smith, 1997, p. 178). Smith (1997) is now a volunteer with the Gay and Lesbian Switchboard which helps counsel young gay people and also volunteers as a carer for people with AIDS. For most of these men, immigration was an attempt to avoid the isolation they grew up with, which has resulted in their supporting the community that helped them accept, embrace and internalise their own gay identity.

3.8.3 Dealing with homophobia

Savin-Williams (1998) identify homophobia as one of the “distal (or far) forces” that influences adolescent behaviour (p. 9), and this is particularly true for young gay males as they make their transition into gay adulthood, as society is “overwhelmingly homophobic” (Siegel & Lowe, 1995, p. 159). In this next section, I will spend some time looking at what is homophobia and how homophobia is manifested in our society. Homophobia as contemporarily defined by the Oxford Dictionary (The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary) as a “fear or hatred of homosexuals and homosexuality” (Brown, 1993, p. 1254), while Plummer (1999) distinguishes homophobia from any other type of phobia by identifying its five key differences which are: it is characterised by “hatred or anger”, its responses are often considered “understandable, justified, and acceptable”, manifests itself as “hostility and aggression”, usually relates to a political agenda of “prejudice and discrimination”, and, people who are homophobic do not view it as “disabling” and hence are not motivated to change (p. 4).

Plummer (1999) states, that in Western culture homophobia is often directed at “effeminate” men and also seems to occur “when same sex gender conventions are not
observed rather than when characteristics of the ‘opposite sex’ are expressed” (p. 8). He also states that the majority of homophobic people are and remain heterosexual, although others believe that some perpetrators of homophobia are “heterosexual who are suppressing and repressing more universal homoerotic impulses” (Plummer, 1999, p. 10). Plummer also states that homophobia plays a strong motive for anti-homosexual violence, and that as a class of people, gay men and lesbian women are at greater risk of “harassment, violence and murder” (1999, p. 11).

In Australia, a study of anti-homosexual incidents (total of 184) showed that they take the form of physical assault: some resulting in serious injuries, others “involving injuries to the head, torso, and limbs”, whilst others involved no weapons apart from “fists and feet and some involved knives and other objects like clubs, bottles and stones” (Plummer, 1999, p. 13). These statistics are in line with North American studies, where the victimization involved verbal abuse, threats of violence, property violence, “targets of objects”, being followed or chased, being spat upon or “punched, hit or kicked” (Plummer, 1999, p. 15).

Plummer adds further that places which were considered safe havens from such acts as “schools and with the family, are not safe havens at all” (1999, p. 16). Students do face “anti-homosexual harassment at schools”, comprising “verbal harassment, threats of violence and physical violence”, whilst in the home (based on US studies) they are likely to face “familial verbal abuse, and physical abuse” (Plummer, 1999, pp. 17-18). In Australia, the police offer no safe haven either, as 30% of the people studied reported “police victimisation” (Plummer, 1999, p. 18).

Plummer (1999) states that homophobia, usually targeted against homosexuals, occurs in society because homosexuality is often seen as being against tradition: represented by “god, nature and the natural order of things” (p. 24), as against the future: encapsulated by the concepts of “family, race and reproduction” (p. 27) and also against society: as it is often viewed as “antisocial, treacherous and criminal” (p. 29). Homophobia in its simplest form,
takes the form of name calling using colloquial terms used to refer to homosexuals and words like “poofter, poof, fag or faggot are widespread” (Plummer, 1999, p. 40). These words, are used as a “derogatory term with negative connotations” (p. 41) such a being a girl, being “weak, soft and wussy” (p. 45), or even being “unmasculine” (not macho or male) (p. 49). Sometimes being academic carries with it the “stigma of being emotional and being unmasculine” states Plummer (1999, p. 49), and “being special in the home” carries with it the associated homophobic teasing in the home (p. 51). Plummer also states that minor physical differences like “hair, skin colour, hairstyle, and dress code” can also incite homophobic name calling (1999, p. 53), and the same can be said about “not belonging to a particular group” (p. 55) or “not playing sports” (p. 57).

To avoid these homophobic insults, threats or abuse, boys learn from an early age how to cope with these issues affecting or impacting them. Plummer (1999) adds that to begin with they start by “adjusting when and where they cry” (p. 139), they also confine their dress “to significant items of clothing”, as they become increasingly aware as they get older that appearance “can be a signifier for gender” (p. 143), and they also modify their behaviour such that their mode of play “does not transgress gender standards” (p. 147). Plummer (1999) states that as gender standards are “internalised at an early age” and hence, they are important at school, so boys often find that it is too risky to be different from the others, which means that “getting good marks would make them too noticeable” (p. 147) and dancing with girls is also “unacceptable with their peers” (p. 148).

Homophobia has significant implication for the gay male growing up, as it has a direct effect on the gay person’s “sense of self and identity” (Plummer, 1999, p. 167). “Harassment, threats, and violence” are the likely outcomes of homophobia against the gay male growing up, states Plummer (1999), and these outcomes could be simply the result of “being linked or associated with the wrong boy” (p. 167). Schools provide no real safe haven either, so the boys learn to “modify their behaviour” in terms of the type of activities they pursued in school.
(Plummer, 1999, p. 175). Family arrangements can also be disrupted by a male child coming out to the family, so the male child learns “to try to relinquish or hide their sexual orientation” to avoid disrupting their families (Plummer, 1999, p. 177).

For many gay men, homophobia can also result in guilt: by being associated with people who are stigmatised, the result of his own emerging homosexual feelings and his “awareness of the social disapproval of his awakening sexual identity” or through religious beliefs (Plummer, 1999, pp. 180-181). This can sometimes result, states Plummer (1999), in the young men feeling isolated and as a result of that to withdraw from society even more (p. 183), resulting in them concealing their stigmatised behaviour and leading what amounts to a double life (pp. 187-188), trying to change one’s sexual preference (p. 189) and in the extreme case to do yourself self-harm (p. 193).

It is important to understand that there are no rules here, and what works for some, may not necessarily work for others. It is the support structures (at school, in the home and in society) that are put in place for the young gay male that will decide and enhance their transformation into gay adult males. Although many of the respondents I interviewed did experience some form of homophobia during the course of their lifetime, none recalled ever having been physically abused or attacked, apart from some instances of verbal abuse and name calling. As a result, their experiences were less traumatic and their consequences less daunting for them to overcome.

**3.8.4 Making intimate friends**

For many gay men the experience of isolation (as a result of their feeling different from family and society), coupled with the homophobia they are subject to, cause them to immigrate to large cities where they try to find a supportive family and “a comforting and comfortable condition of life” (Siegel & Lowe, 1995, p. 159). As a result they have, throughout their lives to, “seek and select a new concentric circle of families”, where membership is purely voluntary, and usually incorporates “lovers, ex-lovers, friends and
children” (Siegel & Lowe, 1995, p. 160). “Gay families change the definition of family and continue to do so” state Siegel and Lowe (1995, p. 163), and theirs is a society which knows no bounds, where everything is possible and “anything can happen and usually does” (p. 163). Leddick (2000) chronicled the intimate and interwoven lives of George Platt Lynes (a world renowned photographer), Paul Cadmus (a famous US artist) and Lincoln Kirstein (Co-Founder of NYCB). Their “social context was sexual”, and it dominated and directed most of their lives proceedings, and was the basis of their friendship and intimacy (Leddick, 2000, p. 7).

Lincoln Kirstein, “Impresario Extraordinaire”, used his family fortune to bring ballet to the United States in the “person and choreography of George Balanchine”, he also created the School of American Ballet, and later created the American Shakespeare Company (Leddick, 2000, p. 4). Leddick (2000) states Kirstein favoured Paul Cadmus, and Fidelma Cadmus (his wife and sister to Paul), and was also known to “worship beautiful boys – mainly his ballet boys” (p. xviii). Although he married Fidelma Cadmus, Kirstein was essentially homosexual, but he was “admired, exalted and honoured” for his “long service to the world, his originality, and his genius” (p. xix).

Paul Cadmus, outside of his studio, was a “cultivated man”, and he lived with his long time companion Jon Andersson (Leddick, 2000, p. xvi). Cadmus was never in the closet, he was honest about himself and his relationships, an atypically promiscuous homosexual, and was “loved and revered by all his contemporaries” (Leddick, 2000, p. xvi).

George Platt Lynes was the typical established gay man of the thirties, forties, and fifties, handsome, successful in his work, which gave him “universal recognition and status”, affording him a princely lifestyle, a prodigious sex life and affairs that “were serious and meaningful” and considered the “aristocracy of the New York homosexual world” (Leddick, 2000, p. xi). He involves himself mostly with “attractive and bright people, his ballet boys and talented friends”, which included Monroe Wheeler, his lover of many years, Glenway
Westcott, a third member of his triumvirate, and Lincoln Kirstein and Paul Cadmus, who contributed to the “carefree gay life style of the forties and fifties in New York” (Leddick, 2000, p. xi). His fascination for ballet boys and his friendship with Lincoln Kirstein resulted in his “memorialising and enabling” the “Balanchine-Kirstein masterpiece” as he was the official photographer of the New York City Ballet right from its inception (Leddick, 2000, p. xiii).

Platt Lynes played a major role in his group, which included Paul Cadmus, and they even “shared the use of many male models”, many of whom were discovered by him (Leddick, 2000, p. 2). Leddick (2000) states that Platt Lynes “photographed everybody, knew everybody, and slept with everybody” and lived in a ménage a trois with Museum of Modern Art exhibitions director, Monroe Wheeler, and the writer Glenway Westcott. Leddick (2000) states that the work of Cadmus, Platt Lynes, and Kirstein is all the more remarkable given the fact that “it was all accomplished in the face of the homophobia of American society and its cultural elite” (p. 297).

As these men were working in the arts and performing arts, they could afford to adopt an “everybody knows and nobody cares attitude, which was true for them, but untrue for many others”; as they set the example and led the way in this liberation, and their “openly led lives resulted in so much that is free and brave today” and as such, allows many gay men today “to live with the freedom they enjoyed” (Leddick, 2000, p. 297). The intertwining and interweaving of these men’s lives offer a shiny and vibrant example of what is possible, and also provides valuable insights as to what is possible with the concentric circle of friends that make up the families of gay men today.

**3.9 MEN DANCING their SEXUALITY**

Dancers and choreographers use the human body as their instrument of choice to dance, and to choreograph to and with. The body is inextricably gendered and hence, bring with it all the associations of sexuality, sexual identity and some aspects of sexual behaviour.
This is unavoidable, and for many, can be a source of contention. Gay male dancers and choreographers work with their bodies, and therefore face a number of different dilemmas in terms of their dancing and choreographing. They can choose to transcend their sexuality, or they can choose to politicise their sexuality in terms of their dancing and choreographing. In the final section of this chapter, I look at some of these issues and discuss how some dancer/choreographers have chosen to dance/choreograph around their sexuality, while others have chosen to dance/choreograph about their sexuality.

### 3.9.1 Gender, sexuality and dance

Carter (1998) and Polhemus (1998) state dance reflects and produces the dominant notions of what it takes to be male and female in society. Dance, states Carter (1998) can be seen as a “stylisation of the physical culture of society” and it therefore embodies gender which is one of the most “significant subjective and social distinctions of any culture” (p. 121). Gender, according to Polhemus (1998), is problematic in that no matter how much we strive to be objective, “all of us are either male or female” and none of us can truly say we have experienced life “from the perspective of the gender which we are not” (p. 176).

Polhemus (1998) goes on to state that gender is a “primary and insurmountable existential division” which must, and will, define cultural experience and our perception of cultural reality, because life can only be experienced from the point of view of “one’s particular gender” (p. 176). He goes on further to add that because culture exists in the “mind’s eye” of the particular individual, “all of the world’s cultures must be multiplied by two: the male culture and the female culture” (Polhemus, 1998, p. 176). Since the distinction between the sexes is universal in all human societies, therefore, culture is “bifurcated into male culture and female culture”, and the men’s dance style, is a “crystallisation of what it means” to be a male member of their culture (Polhemus, 1998, p. 176).

Jordan and Thomas (1998) are critical of how the male culture dominates the female culture in dance. Historically, especially in the Nineteenth Century, suggests Nash (1998),
audiences in ballet were predominantly men, and it was also assumed that the audience would be male (p. 104), therefore making the gaze in dance “male and heterosexual” with women being the object of the gaze (Thomas, 1996, p. 73). Carter (1996) states insightfully “dance is an art form populated by women. Although those in positions of power such as patrons, sponsors, funders, artistic directors, and choreographers of mainstream companies still tend to be men” (p. 43). The power is centred on the male viewer, whom Thomas (1996) calls the voyeur and the female dancer is “displayed to gratify the audience’s (voyeurs) desire” (p. 75).

The presence of a man on stage “presented a troublesome barrier to its enjoyment” as the man drew attention to himself by displaying his female partner (Nash, 1997, p. 104). Fleming (2000) states categorically that this troublesome nature of the male on stage may be attributed to the men being in tights, with their lower body being exposed, hence for all intents and purposes “flaunting the illicit parts of his body” (p. 13). This flaunting reveals both the butt and the crotch which holds no real interest for straight (heterosexual) man, but is in fact, an embarrassment for them (Fleming, 2000, p. 13).

In dance (ballet) especially, the male dancer takes on the “traditional role of being physically stronger and more powerful than the female” (Jordan & Thomas, 1998, p. 245). While there have been a movement towards women’s liberation and equality of the sexes in certain aspects of social life, states Jordan and Thomas (1998) “these have been underpinned by the continuation of the status quo whereby the traditional power bases in society still remain male dominated” (p. 245). I would like to make and add a personal distinction here. It is my strong belief that the traditional dominance of men in society as a whole is based on the power bases being held by heterosexual men, rather than gay men.

Hanna (1988) states “women and gay men predominate in western theatre (high culture) dance” (p. 119). Hanna (1988) goes on to state that women and gays, groups often stigmatised in the United States in terms of prejudice and discrimination, “have sought escape from social and economic constraints” by going into dance as one option (p. 120), and while
in some cases there is also a “male straight/gay distinction”, where the former is considered as being “more prestigious” (p. 121).

3.9.2 Gay men and dance

Koegler (1995) states considering the fact that dance and ballet have and hold the greatest contingent of homosexuals among the performing arts, its ‘coming out’ has taken and unusually long time, and we in fact “know next to nothing about the role homosexuality has played” in the history of ballet (p. 231). In fact historically, dance had been the “domain of men (heterosexual) in terms of audience” (Nash, 1997, p. 104), this could account for the lateness of its ‘coming out’, despite the fact that the spectacle of male sexuality would have been appreciated more by gay men (and heterosexual women). It would make me suspect and almost believe that the performing arts world is incredibly politicised.

Most directors of ballet companies are men, but if they are gay, “they are marginalised socially and subordinated in relation to heterosexual men” (Wulff, 2001, p. 110). Wulff (2001) adds further that “male homosexuality is not accepted” in the ballet world, so much so, gay directors and other prominent ballet people “keep their personal partnerships” in the background, as gay couples are not invited to public events and thus creating and promoting an atmosphere of “concealing homosexuality, at least initially, in the ballet world” (p. 110). It is not uncommon, states Wulff (2001), for gay men in the ballet world to engage in “layers of alliances and antagonisms” with male bisexuality producing a kind of “mobile gender with some men having both male and female lovers” (p. 110). Male homosexuality in the ballet world has resulted in assumptions about homosexuality being handled through jokes, and on occasions leading to “embarrassment, surprises and disappointments for women and their potential romantic attractions and/or involvements with gay men” (Wulff, 2001, p. 113). These are some of the practical and physical realities facing homosexual men in the arena of dance.
Hanna (1988) discusses a number of different factors that may account for why women and gay men turn to dance. Hanna (1988) states that onstage dance provides for the opportunity to “convey a host of sexual and gender motifs” (p. 5) as well as convey concepts of sex and gender (p. 10). Dance can be a “potent form of gender modelling” states Hanna (1988) as it allows the gay male to focus on his body, as it is the instrument of dance and sexuality, and allows the imagination to run free, and it also depends heavily on “flaunting the body”, and focussing the “awareness on the body and its associations” (Hanna, 1988, p. 12).

Taube (1998) states that as a gay person “I ask questions of sexuality and gender in my daily life and this transposes into my work consciously and subconsciously” (p. 112), and “I am interested in how my ‘physical cultural’ upbringing has informed my body language from day to day and how this feeds into my choreographic practice” (p. 113).

Dance is also multi-sensory, and helps to promote “gender continuity and change” by going beyond language and engaging all the senses in “seducing us through a multi-sensory impact” (Hanna, 1988, p. 16). Dance has the power to move and persuade and has been recognised in history (Hanna, 1988, p. 17), and it can also convey sexual imagery due to its popularity and accessibility (Hanna, 1988, p. 19). Hanna (1988) adds further that there has been a growth in the popularity of dance in the 1980s, so much so that its sexual and gender signification has led to its use in advertising products, because the sexuality of dance and its potential to excite, though long been recognised, is now being monopolised (p. 22).

Despite these difficulties and hardships, there are still disproportionately more gay men represented in the world of dance. This may specifically be attributed to a number of wide ranging and yet related issues. Hanna (1988) states that the art world offers gay men who are marginalised and on the “fringe of society” a number of different opportunities: “to express an aesthetic sensibility” that is both “emotional and erotic”, insulation from a rejecting society, “an avenue of courtship”, and an arena to “deal with homosexual concerns” (p. 136). It is also said that the gay male does not have much to lose by choosing a career in
dance, as he has already broken the impact of “mainstream sexual behaviour”, so this “occupational deviancy” is considered by many as less threatening for them” (Hanna, 1988, p. 136). Some say the gay male has a feminine sensibility which is erotic, and they are better able to “identify with the effeminate yearnings, feelings and romantic idealisation of the ballet” and more importantly, dance themes in ballet afford the opportunity for the gay men to play roles “demanded by (heterosexual) society that they cannot fulfil in real life” (Hanna, 1988, p. 137).

The world of ballet offers the gay man an opportunity to “compensate for his own self questioning and even self loathing”, by obtaining and sustaining a sense of “personal and social strength” through identification with a powerful “ballet master, choreographer or Director”, as well as, “an accepting group” (of dancers) (Hanna, 1988, p. 137). The gay male dancer attains perfection and power through the “rigorous, esoteric demands of ballet training with its ritualistic language, dress and studio stage routines” (Hanna, 1988, p. 137). Hanna (1988) states further that the world of dance affords the gay man an opportunity to openly meet with other gay men or potential partners, or even “sexual consummation through the intense sensuality and physicality in dance” (p. 138). In short, the art makes it possible for them to explore themselves, their homosexuality, and their sexual identity (Hanna, 1988, p. 38).

### 3.9.3 Gay men dancing around (homo)sexuality

Dancers dance with and through their individual and gendered bodies. Choreographers choreograph with their own and through the individually gendered bodies of other dancers. These movements and/or dances are inherently, and at times overtly and covertly masculine or feminine as prescribed by society’s norms (standards of behaviour). So dance is to a large degree, necessarily indivisible from gender, sexual behaviour and sexuality. Gay male dancer/choreographers are in a very fortunate position to be able to take advantage of this fact to dance/choreograph, and hence politicise their sexuality, or to
alternatively, transcend their sexuality by not disclosing it, which is their right and choice; and choose to do what I call here: to dance around their sexuality and/or sexual selves. This right, to choose to disclose their sexuality and sexual identity, especially for the homosexual male, has for a long time been constrained by society’s moral code and laws.

The Harvard Law Review (1989) states that in the USA, where there exists the “institutionalisation of gender roles and heterosexuality” (p. 7), the label homosexual amounts to choosing to be “deviant” by society’s standards (p. 8), and legal statutes in place tend to only “reinforce stereotypical sex roles” (p. 17). In fact, criminal law still continues to “stigmatise gay men and lesbians” through the “criminalisation of same sex sodomy” and prohibitions on “the solicitation of same sex sexual partners” (Harvard Law Review, 1989, p. 43).

This was the case for both Ted Shawn and Merce Cunningham, who as dancer/choreographers, lived through the 1940s and 1950s in the United States. It was in the period from 1947 through to the mid 1950s, the period when ‘McCarthyism’ prevailed: when homosexuality was grouped with communism as a “grave evil to be rooted out of the Federal Government” (Harvard Law Review Association, 1989, p. 46) and the hunt for Communists as security risks got blown out of proportion resulting in ninety one people resigning from the State Department, most of whom were deemed to be in the “shady category…most of these were homosexuals” (Duer, 2000, p. 51). In April 1953, states Duer (2000), President Eisenhower, the US President at the time signed “Executive Order 10450, officially making it legal to refuse employment to or to fire federal employees on the grounds of sexual perversion” (p. 51), of which homosexuality is in such a classification. These were the times in which these two dancer/choreographers sought to make their living in the dance profession. It is not surprising therefore to find a number of different strategies of concealment being employed by these gay male dancer/choreographers.
Ted Shawn and his all male troupe revolutionised the way people viewed male dancers when they performed all over the United States in the 1930s (Carman, 2002; Foster, 2001; Foulkes, 2001; Foulkes, 2002; Sherman & Mumaw, 2000; Reynolds & McCormick, 2003; Siegel, 1979;). Foulkes (2001) states that Shawn’s dictum was “Dancing is for men, American men” and that “America demands masculinity more than art” (p. 113). Ted Shawn, Mid west born, possessed an early ambition to be a Minister, but as a third year student at University, contracted diphtheria and sought out dance to rebuild his health, dexterity and stamina (Foulkes, 2001; Foulkes, 2002). In keeping with his ideals and religious values, Ted Shawn sought marriage with Ruth St Denis, another modern dance pioneer; but the marriage never lasted, despite their successful pairing and establishing of the Denishawn Dance School (Carman, 2002; Foulkes, 2001; Foulkes, 2002; Siegel, 1979). This marriage did not last, because St Denis sought the affections of younger men during their marriage, and Shawn sought the affection and love of men (Foulkes, 2001).

But Shawn’s liaison with men were all kept secret (Foulkes, 2001, pp. 116-117) despite the fact that he managed to maintain two long time lovers, Barton Mumaw from 1931 to 1948 (Foulkes, 2002; Sherman & Mumaw, 2000) and John Christian, from 1949 until Shawn’s death in 1972 (Foulkes, 2002). The strategy of non-concealment and secrecy was one strategy employed. Shawn spent a large part of his life trying to break the stereotype of male dancing being feminine, so he choreographed dances for himself and other men that “stressed the strength and musculature of athletes, labourers and gods” (Sherman & Mumaw, 2000, p. xi).

In 1932, after his break from Ruth St Denis, Shawn decided to show America that “men could choose modern dance as a legitimate, masculine profession; so he hired and trained men, many of whom were star college athletes, to dance his choreography with his new company” (Carman, 2002, p. 2). Shawn decided, states Sherman and Mumaw (2000), that this redefinition of masculinity in dance also required a disavowal of homosexuality (p.
xvii). Shawn found a way to achieve this and focussed his efforts on creating a “Greek ideal is his group of men dancers, combining athletic grace, philosophical import and the quest for beauty through the male body” (Foulkes, 2002). This commitment by Shawn to promoting men in dance, also encompassed his “idealisation of homosexual love between men” to fortify his belief in the “higher ideal of love between men” (Foulkes, 2001, p. 119). This philosophical ideal included “homosexuality – in action” (Foulkes, 2001, p. 120).

Although the company danced “close to nude”, they were rarely admonished for doing so even in (conservative) Boston states Foulkes (2001), and the hyper masculinity of his troupe “diminished the homosexual implications of bare bodies” because it did not fit into society’s stereotype of male homosexuality as “effeminate inversion”, and at the same time, challenging the “common homosexual images of sissies” (p. 129). Shawn directly “confronted audience prejudices” against dance and homosexuality, and by showing the noble male body engaged in “vital virile expressive work, he begged entirely the question of the dancers sexual orientation” (Foster, 2001, p. 165). This vision of Shawn’s depended much upon a “heightened machismo and muscular bravado”, but ultimately came at a price, the “closeting of his” own homosexuality (Foulkes, 2002, p. 95). But, he did leave a legacy to the dance world – Jacobs Pillow, his old farm house, which is now a permanent home in rural Massachusetts dedicated purely to the pursuit of dance.

Mark Morris, a well known American dancer/choreographer; is full of praise for his fellow statesman (State of Washington) Merce Cunningham, and calls him the “most consistently interesting choreographer around” (Copeland, 2004, p. 2). Nash (1997) stated that “he has had a profound influence on queer choreographers” (p. 106) but, without his aesthetic ever being “described as queer” (p. 107). Copeland (2004) states that Cunningham is also famous for having liberated “dance from its traditional dependence upon music” and furthermore, that no one has “revised the fundamentals more fundamentally that Merce Cunningham, for example: the relationship between movement, music and rhythm” (p. 2).
Merce Cunningham is most famous for his use of chance and indeterminacy in dance, working together very closely with musician John Cage (Burt, 1995; Copeland, 2004; Foster, 2001; Franko, 1995; Nagura, 1996). Copeland (2004) goes on to state that Cunningham is “one of the great pioneers of contemporary classicism in dance” and his classicism has as much to do with his use of chance as with his reballeticising of modern dance” (p. 6).

Franko (1995) suggests that the style of Cunningham’s approach – the “aesthetics of indifference appeared to carry a modernist reduction to a new stage”, but “his neutrality” was in fact a “reassertion of inwardness” as a form of “inviolable privacy” which has been suggested as being a “covert gay position” (p. xii). Cunningham was closely associated with the composer John Cage, and painters Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, all of whom are known to be homosexual, and the composer and musician John Cage was in fact his partner for many years. Given the fact that Cunningham was trying to make a name for himself in the dance world in the 1950s in the United States, it is not surprising that Cunningham took a more covert approach towards his homosexuality. Cunningham obviously chose the strategy of non-discussion, based on personal privacy” (Copeland, 2004). Katz (1999) states that Cage who travelled through the culture of the 1940s with a macho, often homophobic community of “abstract expressionism” (p. 237), and embracing a gay life made it very clear that “anything like communication was not possible” (p. 236) and his “conspicuous silence regarding his sexuality is an index of a time thankfully receding into the past” (p. 237).

Copeland (2004) states that in doing it his way, Cunningham was seeking to “flee some aspect of himself that he would rather not publicly acknowledge” and that a “sexual/political reading of his work” would do very little to “illuminate his art” (p.258). His earliest choreography in the 1940s was expressive in the traditional sense (Franko, 1995, p. 77). In the 1950s his choreography was distinguished by the “disassociation of dance and music” and he did this by “applying John Cage’s ideas on chance procedure to his
choreographic vocabulary” (Franko, 1995, p. 77). By early 1951, Cunningham started playing with the idea of chance, when he decided to determine the arrangement of sequences by tossing coins, thereby utilising an ‘impersonal’ (and much more objective) mode of aesthetic decision making” (Copeland, 2004, p. 71). In some other dances, Cunningham used the concept of chance further, where the decisions concerning “sequence, duration and the direction of movement for each dancer were also arrived at by tossing coins…and including rolling dice, picking cards and consulting the I Ching” (Copeland, 2004, pp. 73-74) and to also introduce indeterminacy, by allowing his dancers “a certain freedom, not about the movements themselves, but about tempo, direction and whether to do certain movements or not” (Nagura, 1996, p. 272).

Reynolds and McCormick (2003) state Cunningham had established a “new non-synchronistic relationship between dance and sound” and that he believed they could be “both separate and interdependent, existing in the same time but standing alone” (p. 360). Franko (1995) adds further that Cunningham’s philosophy was to allow “a natural rather than an imposed relationship to arise between dance and music” and that there would be “no attempt on the part of the individual dancer to match or control the social” and that this “aesthetic neutrality” carried with it “a seemingly indifferent stance toward gender” (Franko, 1995, p. 83). Burt (1995) termed this as “unisex choreography” where “differences between male and female dancers are not especially important to the sorts of formal, aesthetic qualities presented in the dance material” (p. 137). Reynolds and McCormick had this say about the Cunningham dancers - “they were like objects which inhabit the space with them” and they were “discreet and self-contained” (2003, p. 360).

Cunningham found “protection for his homosexual identity” (Foster, 2001, p. 175) by focussing on time, space, and motion (Manning, 2001), and also to focus his movement on the “individual’s response to an interpretation of that movement” (Foster, 2001, p. 175). Foster (2001) goes on to state that Cunningham’s determination to cultivate “the body as a neutral
field of possibilities prohibited narrative continuity and denied the standard cultural codes for
gendered and sexual identities” (p. 175). His approach meant everyone was equal: male,
female, black or white bodies, and that difference in his dances were only a result of
differences between “distinctive physical capacities of each individual body’s joint flexibility,
bone length, muscular mass, speed or dexterity” and not in racial or sexual identity (Foster,
2001, p. 174). In essence, “Cunningham concentrated more intently on the process of

Despite all these facts, states Foster (2001), Cunningham’s choreography advocated
“fields of possibility, denying the sexual and gendered referents of the dancing body” but in
doing so, his dances “articulated gender difference and gestured toward Cunningham’s
masculine and even homosexual identity”: where male and female dancers performed
“overlapping yet distinctive vocabularies of movement in which men partnered and lifted
women” (p. 177). Despite his wanting to stay away from the being noticed in the 1950s,
Cunningham does end up being viewed as a “maverick” (Foster, 2001, p. 178) in the current
time.

Both these men Ted Shawn and Merce Cunningham, although unique and
characteristically different in their approach to the handling of their sexuality in dance, not
only made significant inroads into the world of modern dance, but also made significant
contributions to dance.

3.9.4 Gay men dancing (homo)sexuality

Sexual Liberation in the 1960s afforded many women the opportunity for sexual
equality and freedom, and with the ceremonial burning of the bra (brassiere), a symbol of
women’s oppression, began the Feminist Movement. But it was not until “the Stonewall
Riots at 1.20am on 28 June, 1969” (Duerer, 2000, p. 53) when gay men fought back against
NYC Police for their right and freedom to assert their sexuality and sexual choice, did gay
men begin to break the bonds and chains of societal oppression and constraint. Disclosure
became the “central strategy of the gay movement” and self revelation brought out the promise of “bringing about real change in the social situation of gays and of overcoming the self-hatred and shame they often feel” (Cain, 1993, p. 294). It was for many a reclaiming of their self-identity and self-worth and on an individual level, disclosure was seen as being a necessary move “in achieving a positive gay identity” (Cain, 1993, p. 295). These cultural and social factors states Cain (1993), play an important role in “shaping people’s sense of identity, their sexuality and how they manage their personal information” (p. 308). Since that time, dancer/choreographers have been freely able to express their sexuality in and through dance, and hence dance/choreograph their (homo) sexuality.

In this section, I have chosen to focus on two gay male dancer/choreographers (to begin with), two of a very large number of possibilities, far too many to include here, but in fact more suitable and appropriate as a separate and distinct piece of research work on Gay Males, Dance and Dancing, in the Modern Dance landscape. The two men I have chosen are Mark Morris and Matthew Bourne, an American and an Englishman, both of whom have made major contributions to the world of modern dance today and who have chosen not to conceal their sexuality and sexual identity, but in fact, use it in their dances and choreography.

Hanna (1988) calls Mark Morris the choreographer of the 1980s who “identifies himself as a gay artist and his sexual orientation and attitudes are evident in his work” and he acknowledges the fact that he did so because he was tired of “pretending to a straight guy in love with a ballerina” (p. 234). Reynolds and McCormick (2003) stated that Morris embodied an “anti-establishment stance” and that manifested itself in “an open display of homosexuality” to a “conspicuous exploration of gender issues” on stage, in his dances and dancing (p. 627). Burt (1995) also states that Morris loves playing around with “signifiers of gender and sexuality that are socially contentious and on the margins of acceptability” (pp. 184-185).
Acocella (1993) states that Morris started dancing “by way of playing”, and when he started dance training his teacher had great admiration for “he could do almost anything she asked of him, but what seemed to her most extraordinary was his power of concentration” and he could “pick up anything immediately” (pp. 20-21).

The death of his father made a mark on his life in that in the autumn of the year of his father’s death, he graduated from High School, and went to Europe with friends, but later settled down in Madrid, Spain to study Spanish Dance, which was his childhood dream (Acocella, 1993, pp. 23, 40). This proved, state Acocella (1993), to be a trying time for Morris, who as a homosexual and found it really hard to live in Franco’s Spain and became part of the gay subculture that was highly illegal, causing him to return home after five months in Madrid, only to move to New York to become a choreographer (Acocella, 1993).

This he did, and even managed to start his own company. At the age of 32, he was appointed as House Director of Dance at Belgium’s State Opera House, the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, replacing “Maurice Béjart, who for the past quarter of the century was the dance Director of the Monnaie” (Acocella, 1993, p. 5). He moved there with his company in 1988, but his stay there was short-lived and by 1992, he was succeeded by Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker. Part of the reason for this was the fact, states Acocella (1993), that the “Belgians revered Béjart for his sexy up to date ballets, full of brooding” (p. 5), he “revolutionised ballet during his reign in Brussels” (p. 212) and also never found it necessary to declare his homosexuality, “he was chic about it” (p. 215).

This was such a sharp contrast, states Acocella (1993), to Morris who had a “reputation for being Mr Outrageous” (p. 6), and he earned his “enfant terrible reputation” (p. 6), he was outspoken and extroverted (p. 6), but more importantly he disliked “institutionalised hypocrisy”, which was common in Europe (p. 214), and he not shy about “telling the press that he was homosexual” (p. 215). Reynolds and McCormick add that Morris refused to draw the line between what was classified (in Europe especially) as high
and low culture, and this sometimes resulted in his deliberate “flamboyant commingling of formal and casual elements” giving the dances he created a “complexion of sophisticated camp” (2003, p. 629). This was the situation with his choreography and his dances.

Morris was very interested in exposure and one of the “curiosities of his choreography was his love for buttocks” and he was constantly “showing the buttocks” (Acocella, 1998, pp. 76-77). It was not just the buttocks that he was interested in for he also “makes heavy use of the crotch” (Acocella, 1998, p. 79). He did this, because for him, they seem to represent “something modest and tender and unacknowledged, the body’s vulnerability” (Acocella, 1998, p. 79).

Throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, Morris created a number of different dances that “had as its focus, the issue of gender” (Morris, 1996, p. 142). This decade long investigation states Morris (1996) culminated in two major works, Dido and Aeneas (in 1989) where Morris performs the central roles of Dido and the Sorceress, whilst “using his body as a site of gender instability to examine sexual desire” and another work The Hard Nut (in 1991), where he “turned to his company to create a proliferation of gender identities” (p. 141). Morris (1996) goes on to state that the dancer/choreographer “politicised his sexuality” by talking very openly about it in interviews, he also “cultivated a persona in which gender confusion reigned and which, in important instances, spilled over into how his dances are viewed and more importantly, both on and off stage “he used his body and his choreography during these years to ruffle the waters of gender identity” (pp. 142-143). He consciously “emphasises his body and uses these different aspects of his body (extreme flexibility, soft and fatty) as an element to upset dichotomous gender categories” (pp. 145-146). In his other piece, The Hard Nut, Morris (1996) observes that Morris, the dancer, is interested in “disrupting assumptions about the duality of gender, not in destroying heterosexuality”, but to bring out the point that gender is “an extremely varied activity that includes heterosexuality’ and that heterosexuality is not compulsory but is rather “simply one more gender possibility” (p. 155). By doing this,
Morris (the dancer) is “subverting gender” (Fleming, 2000, p. 15), at least the traditional view.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Matthew Bourne, an Englishman has been making headlines specifically for his interpretation of Swan Lake. Matthew Bourne and his company Adventures in Motion Pictures (AMP) came into prominence when his show Swan Lake opened on Broadway and his show entered the syllabus for Dance A Levels in Britain (Macaulay, 1999, p. xv).

Macaulay (1999), states Bourne, was very fortunate in life as his parents “gave him support, but never pressure” (p. xvii) and as a child growing up at home, Bourne was doing amateur theatricals; he was even allowed to put on productions at school, and in his late teens “he had a company called Pumps which rehearsed and performed at youth clubs” (Macaulay, 1999, p. 5) and even remembers the earliest things he listened to were musicals (Macaulay, 1999). Macaulay (1999), states Bourne, was bitten by the bug when he saw a Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movie and was “absolutely convinced that this was what he wanted to do” and he learned how to borrow ideas from things that he taped on the family video and that was his beginning for making choices as a choreographer: “borrowing ideas or just copy them” (p. 9).

Macaulay (1999) adds that Bourne’s sexual awakening began at eighteen when he had his first kiss, and when he did have his first kiss with a man, and when he first had sex, he “had no problems at all...It all seemed completely natural” (p. 10). Macaulay (1999) goes on to add that Bourne “definitely was sexually or sensually excited by a lot of male dancers...There’s something about a male moving with feeling and beauty that I find very appealing” (p. 11). He did not desire women in dance in the same way (Macaulay, 1999). Bourne started dance later in life and one of the first modern dance things he saw was Twyla Tharp’s Company at Saddlers Wells in 1981, and her style made a really big impact on him (Macaulay, 1999). When he did formal dance studies at the Laban Centre in London, he
found he enjoyed the Cunningham technique more than the others he studied because “it had elements of ballet in it, also because it had a formal structure – but one that I could do” (Macaulay, 1999, p. 31). After completing his Bachelor of Arts in dance, he “formed his company AMP which was partly funded by the Enterprise Allowance Scheme” (Macaulay, 1999, p. 45)

One of the first dances which Bourne choreographed based very loosely on a “homosexual or homoerotic theme was called Spitfire which was based on the idea of men posing” (Macaulay, 1999, p. 55). Macaulay (1999) adds further that while working and choreographing with AMP, Bourne realised that he “didn’t fit very comfortably into the world of British Contemporary dance”, but was nonetheless “the first company in Great Britain to have a Mark Morris piece” in their repertoire, and this he felt was due to the fact that there was a “similarity between our dancers and his, and that his dancers were all very individual, and had a spirit that was similar to ours” (p. 61). His next serious adventure in motion pictures was the piece called Town and Country. In this piece, Bourne felt they were “being quite daring in terms of structure, and attempting at times to be very subversive and eccentric” (Macaulay, 1999, p. 67), and he also wanted it to be “something simple and romantic” as a “reaction to the physical theatre around at the time especially DV8 (an English Contemporary dance company) which had just showed very violent male duets” (Macaulay, 1999, p. 68).

Gay male figures abound in Bourne’s work, yet, none of the relationships expressed in his earlier works, be it Town and Country and Spitfire, approaches the “amorous involvement, the dedication to one another depicted between the Swan and the Prince in Swan Lake (Foster, 2001, p. 189). Macaulay (1999) states that some parts of Swan Lake are “the Matthew Bourne story” particularly since it came at a time when he had gone through “a difficult ending to a long term relationship” and that may account for “some of the Prince’s emotional needs in my mind – also the strange worship of a symbol, of a beautiful male creature person” (p. 192). This so called “gay Swan Lake” involved a male prince and becomes a sexual drama
because that was something that interested him from the start: “the sexual issues within it” and that sexual drama would be a strong part of it” with the thought of “Swan Lake with male swans” (Macaulay, 1999, pp. 194-195). Bourne informed Macaulay (1999) that “as it happens, all the dancers playing the Swan to date have been straight and both the Princes gay” (p. 218), but what was a conscious decision was that he “wanted to make Swan Lake about a man – very much a man, who happened to be a prince as well – who had trouble expressing himself and couldn’t, for whatever reason, be who he wanted to be…and the swan was the symbol of what he needed (p. 221).

The characterisation of the swans in Swan Lake is unique states Foster (2001) because they “exude an uncanny otherness”: half bird and half male, “they are not female, not feminine and not effeminate” but strong, bold and the size of “their jumps pronounce their maleness” (pp. 190-191). They are, states Foster (2001), “sexually charged creatures who occupy simultaneously the positions of desiring subject and the desired object” (p. 193), with everything about the dance “pointing to the homosexuality of the romance between the Prince and Swan” – “a portrayal of homosexuality which is both sympathetic and tragic” (p. 192). Foster (2001) states that Bourne’s closet is “one of the most remarkably open closets of any profession” (p. 199).

Two other choreographers are worthy of mention at this stage because they also dance sexuality. Mark Newson of DV8 Physical Dance Theatre, and his particular piece Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men which presents the “loneliness and hollowness that results when gay or straight men are unable to form meaningful relationships”, and explores this through “sado-masochistic situations” (Burt, 1995, p. 188). This is meaningful and significant on at least two levels, first, because it “challenges the audience to recognise that they are looking at men, who are looking at other men, in a way motivated by sexual tastes conventionally judged to be deviant” (p. 189) but more importantly, the dance was first performed at a time when gay men were under pressure from AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome),
from the hostile coverage of AIDS in the press, and also from Clause 28 (which prohibited, because it was illegal, “for local authorities in Great Britain to intentionally promote homosexuality in any form”) (Burt, 1995, p. 187).

The next person is Michael Clark, classically trained at “the RBS, Ballet Rambert, and the Cunningham studio” (Au, 1988, p. 198), and is admired by all for the classicism and “the quality of his line” (Burt, 1995, p. 183) and was considered “the most innovative young choreographer working in Britain” in the late 1980s (Au, 1988, p. 198). Burt (1995), states Clark chose to be a “high profile gay man and dance star”, whose body has achieved almost the “status of a gay icon”, mostly because he uses the exposure of his body as an “outrageously unequivocal statement of his sexuality” (p. 183). Burt states that in one of his solos, he danced naked with his hands holding a big fur muff, and he uses “subversive or parodic strategies” to present “completely unacceptable male behaviour – (homosexual), sex drugs, and rock and roll” from a “normal point of view”, and he has also been known to indulge “naked tongue explorations” on stage in what was described as “the frankest I have ever seen in the theatre and give pause for thought about sex on stage, narcissism and display” (1995, p. 183). When “Clark dances…it has been said, amounts to a display of male homosexual eroticism” (Burt, 1995, p. 184). Clark is without any doubt subversive in his dance, subverting traditional ideas and ideals, in order to dance his (homo)sexuality.

From the mid 1980s to the 1990s, no single event took more media attention than that of the infection and spread of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and the disease that led to AIDS. In many parts of the Western World, HIV/AIDS was seen as almost synonymous with Gay Men, perceived by many as the gay plague, as Gay Men were the ones who were being infected and dying from the disease in almost plague proportions. The Performing Arts world, which for decades had supported the performers and those in the allied professions, lost a large number of their brethren. It would therefore be quite remiss of
me not to make a small mention of those dancers touched by and still dance what I choose to

call their AIDS dance.

Historically, performance has been a “powerful means of intervening in the public
understanding and experience of AIDS and countering neglect of it by the larger culture” and
it did this by providing a “different perspective on events reported in the dominant media,
including those of the gay culture” (Román, 2000, p. 8). The performances of two NYC
dancers, Bill T Jones and Neil Greenberg, not only serve to highlight what it does mean to
live with HIV “after the AIDS crisis has supposedly ended”, but also looks at the
“relationship between AIDS and the performing arts” (Román, 2000, p. 9). In 1994, both
choreographers living with HIV, each premiered an ensemble dance “that has become
something of a signature work” (Román, 2000, p. 9).

Morris (2001) states “Jones dances demonstrate a struggle for identity centered on
questions of power and control manifested through concepts of masculinity” (p. 243).
Still/Here was the piece choreographed by Bill T Jones and performed by his company Bill T
Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company. Román (2000) states that “no other figure in the
performing arts has taken on the public face of someone living with AIDS as willingly as Bill
T Jones” and although he tested positive in 1985 “his HIV status did not become a part of the
public discourse on his work until 1980” when he did an interview for the magazine The
Advocate, which has since then been “a major feature of his life and work by virtually
everyone who has written on him since” (pp. 11-12).

On the other end of the spectrum is Neil Greenberg, who according to Román (2000)
is “not much known outside the dance world” (p. 14). His signature piece Not-About-AIDS
Dance (1994) premiered in NYC, six months before Jones signature work; “inaugurated a
trilogy of dance pieces including The Disco Project (1995) and Part Three (1998)” (Román,
2000, p. 15). In 1994, the NY Times named it “one of the years 10 best dances” and it also
“received a 1995 Bessie Award for outstanding dance and performance” (Román, 2000,
The Trilogy, states Román (2000), tracks Greenberg’s “experience of HIV in the context of the life changes that he and his company members undergo during a four year period” and the personal information is “provided by texts projected on the back wall of the performance space”, and the texts always “expresses Greenberg’s point of view, regardless of who is dancing” (p. 15). Not-About-AIDS Dance, states Román (2000), is “an ironic title meant to call attention to this phenomenon” of “silent signification which characterised most dances in the 1980s and 1990s: the reluctance of choreographers to identify their works with AIDS despite the sense that the work may be about AIDS in some way” (p. 15). This ironic title was meant by Greenberg “to distance his own work” from that phenomenon and to “extend beyond silent signification to comment on the cultural silence and suppression of AIDS” (Román, 2000, p. 15).

Román (2000) states that both men “uncertain of their own futures…created works meant to be understood as about AIDS” (p. 18). Román (2000) adds that “Jones demonstrated with exuberance and physicality and grace what is possible for artists with HIV” and he sought to be the “example of a dancer celebrating his body and humanity through movement”, while Greenberg, on the other hand; “continues to find it politically necessary and artistically useful to mark his relationship to AIDS explicitly” by “building meaning through self referential systems that reflect on the physical process of his (Greenberg’s) infection and the artistic process of his choreography” (pp. 20-21). This is how these men choreograph and perform their AIDS Dance

3.10 RESEARCHING MEN DANCING

Before drawing this chapter to a close, it is critical to review the works of two researchers. In the first instance, it is a piece of research undertaken in Australia, which relates to and informs my research to some degree directly, and to some degree, also indirectly. Michael Gard published his research based on his doctoral thesis in 2006, and I
would like to begin by drawing on the published work’s title to highlight the similarities and more importantly, to also pinpoint the some areas of difference or where our purposes diverge.

Gard’s work is entitled *Men Who Dance: Aesthetics, Athletics and the Art of Masculinity*. His research relies on the interviewing of male dancers as the ‘Men Who Dance’, and in that our research in similar. He also looks at aesthetics as it applies to the world of dance, and in that our research is again similar in nature. But the points of similarity end there.

His thesis was in the field of gender studies, from which he takes his perspective for his research. My background is in Education and Arts Administration, and my thesis does not employ a gender studies bias and/or emphasis in any way, as that is not my focus. I employ a Naturalistic Inquiry methodology, whilst Gard uses a Case Study design. The focus of Gard’s study, is as he puts it “on ballet, an activity often associated with girls and women (2006, p. 2). He wishes to encapsulate the “physical experience of dance” through the “stories male dancers tell” and the “act of dancing generates its own meaning and stories” (Gard, 2006, pp. 8-9). His work is therefore concerned with “the stories, words, ideas, and feelings...and the bodily experiences which are called upon to generate explanations about a male’s decision to be a dancer” (Gard, 2006, p. 12). Gard identifies the idea and practice of dance “moves us to highly contested areas of meaning production, where gender, bodies and sexuality overlap and where these meanings can be urgent and raw” (p. 3). Gard (2006), attempts through this work to locate dance, in the use of the body, within the “politicisation process that eventuates in the construction of gendered identities” (p. 3).

Gard’s research is similar in that we are both hoping to learn more about the “process of becoming a male dancer” and in that process also getting an appreciation of the “process of ‘becoming a man’ and something about the experience of becoming a man and being a man who dances” (Gard, 2006, p. 5). Like Gard, I believe that scant scholarly attention has been
paid to the “actual experience of male dancers” (p. 5). Gard (2006) admits specifically that his interest in the research was in the “coupling of desire and dance” (p. 95).

Gard’s (2006) research can best be explained in terms of “what does it mean to be a male dancer” and “what does it feel like to be a male dancer” and it is with this intention that the divergence in our research arises (pp. 8-9). Gard asks these male dancers to talk about their lives, based on the presumption they would use “pre-existing concepts, ideas, and words – in order to construct themselves” (p. 9). Gard’s emphasis therefore is in the location and construction of their necessarily gendered identities, which is fundamentally different from my research.

My research accepts the men interviewed, in their sexual and gendered identities, as being non-heterosexual men (predominantly homosexual), and ask them how that experience really feels in their profession as dancers, and in feeling that way, what events and consequent decisions were made to get them to where they are in their lives as dancer/choreographers. I make no attempt to locate or construct their sexuality or gendered identities.

Gard (2006) also ties in his background in physical education and exercise science to draw relationships between athleticism and ideals of masculinity. A highly athletic approach to dance movement, in and of itself, cannot be seen to draw any link between dance and sexuality per se, because “there are a range of bodily resources or potentialities which people take up, and which reinforce the ways in which they move, feel and talk about the experience of moving” and in the same way “male heterosexuality comes to be associated with particular ways of feeling and talking” (Gard, 2006, pp. 175-176).

Therefore, by simply exhibiting particular ways of feeling and talking will not necessarily make you a heterosexual male dancer. Put in another way, a gay male dancer can create highly athletic dance movement but that, in and of itself, does not make him a heterosexual male. Gard (2006) makes a cogent point worthy of mention here: heterosexual men do not necessarily exhibit “greater athleticism” but in “constituting themselves as male
dancers” they will “deploy discursive resources which construct their dance practice and themselves as dancers in ways which are inflected (not determined) by stereotypical, one might say heteronormative, discourses of male embodiment” (p. 187).

Therein lies the danger of trying to identify or to even attempt a classification and/or typography of male dancers. My research makes no attempt to draw out any such relationships.

Gard (2006) focuses on why masculine men would take up dance given the social stigma attached to it. Gard looks at the human experience of gender by adopting “an embodied notion of gender”, wherein masculinity is a “contextually specific collection of discursive resources which are mobilised in the construction of gendered identities within gender relations” (2006, p. 30). Gard states “gender refers to the arena of the human being, to feelings, and relations within gender relations”, and that it is also concerned with “the social production of ‘sexed’ bodies, and with the generation and transformation of qualities deemed to signify masculinity and femininity and the ways these are linked to, and experienced by, particular bodies” (Gard, 2006, p. 30). What he does state categorically is that his primary interest is in “the process of identity construction” and that “gender then, is the arena in which gendered identities are constructed. Gender identities are the various subjects positions individuals take up within gender relations” (Gard, 2006, p. 31). From this we can see that Gard’s (2006) main interest was in the process of gender and identity construction, which served as the primary focus of his book.

He adds further that “despite the obvious presence of gay men in dance, this presence is often ignored or even denied in writings about men in dance and there has been clear reluctance to acknowledge that dance might be, or has been, a relatively safe career choice for gay men, or that gay men have been distinctive and important dancers and choreographers” (Gard, 2006, p. 96). Gard’s last statement serves as an explicit reminder of the importance and relevance of my research into non-heterosexual male dancer/choreographers.
This literature review would be quite incomplete, if I did not review the research and publications of dancer, teacher, educator and researcher in dance, Douglas Risner. The nature of Risner’s research focuses on the plight and difficulties faced by gay male dancers in the USA, a subject which he holds quite near and dear to himself (as a gay male dancer himself), and which he critically reflects upon and narrates as the subject in his thesis.

It is not my intention to review all the papers and research he has published, but rather to focus on two specific pieces of his research: his PhD thesis, and his most recently published book *Stigma and Perseverance in the Lives of Boys Who Dance: An Empirical Study of Male Identities in Western Theatrical Dance Training*, which I consider to be a seminal work in terms of his findings about gay male dancers in the USA. Although, the two pieces of research were conducted about eight years apart, their significance lies in the fact that he was able to craft the issues he raised in his PhD thesis and further develop them into a nationwide study culminating with the publishing of his book.

In his thesis, Risner (2001) identifies himself as being “privileged and oppressed” as he makes a life “on the cultural fringe, as a dancer and choreographer, and as a gay father” and he sees it as “having one foot clearly in the dominant centre (being a white male) but the other foot, two arms, and a head in the margin (being a homosexual, a dancer/choreographer, gay father) makes for an awkward negotiation of fluctuating privilege and marginalisation” (p. 3). Risner states that his work is an attempt to respond to what he calls a “double bind situation, the sometimes complacent and complicit nature of privilege and oppressor and at the same time, the resistance and frustration of social marginalisation and oppression” (2001, pp. 3-4). He focuses in the research on the theme of marginalisation, a theme which I will pick up in the discussion chapter (chapter 6) which I choose to call ‘dislocation’.

Risner employs a “narrative autobiographical approach” in his research which he feels helps to “illuminate theoretical research” as it is “a careful, systematic and critical exploration of what has been” which “often delivers one to a place that mysteriously explains one’s
passage and arrival at what has come to be” (2001, p. 6). Risner (2001) articulates succinctly that “autobiographical narrative, in conjunction with reflective practice, reveals my fingerprints and places my concerns squarely at the scene of this inquiry” (p. 7). This is significant as in my research I ask the respondents to critically reflect and relate aspects of their lives (autobiographical) from which I can derive an essence of their past (has been) and a glimpse of their present (has come to be).

Risner provides masterful and powerful insights into the world of dance and the male dancers that inhabit that world, he being one of those people; and how marginalised a position gay men have in this world. He cites dance as being the “bastard stepchild of the arts” and it is often “feigned as overly erotic, insignificant, at best frivolous”, and from the outside looking in, “the most marginal and stigmatised of the marginalised in dance is the gay male dancer” (Risner, 2001, p. 10). Males, he concedes “bring a seeming legitimacy to dance” and despite being a minority, they do “dominate directorial, managerial and choreographic positions” (Risner, 2001, p. 10), whereas “the gay male presence in dance is often suppressed and minimised by the dance community itself” despite the stereotype that “all male dancers are gay” (Risner, 2001, p. 11). Risner (2001) draws our attention to the fact that society proffers a “negative image of homosexuality, the experiences and sensibilities of gay men are rarely if ever presented in the work of professional dance companies and academic dance productions” and this act of concealment he believes, “results in further societal speculation and suspicion, undermining the dances and the lives of all dancers and their audiences, all the while breeding further homophobic attitudes and prejudice towards gays” (pp. 11-12). It is these attitudes of “cultural heterosexism and homophobia” which Risner believes contributes to a conspicuous absence of scholarship and discourse (2001, p. 31), as does institutionalised heterosexism in concert and Western social dance forms (Burt, 1995; Hanna, 1998).

Risner (2001), in using the narrative autobiographical approach, gets his respondents to tell their stories as a strategy to combat the silence of the past, and from the four
autobiographical reflections in his research he is able to detect and establish the emergence of
“several larger themes of human experience” and these “thematic strands” exist in “clusters”
around “the notions of escape and denial, silence and secrecy, confusion and dissonance,
dominant heterocentric privilege and pervasive, homophobic cultural norms” (p. 33).
Elements of all these “thematic clusters” (Risner, 2001, p. 33) exist in some form or another
in the results I obtained which will be further elucidated in Chapter 6.

Risner states that ignoring of cultural issues of sexual orientation, gender identity,
homophobic attitudes and sexual harassment, is to encourage or reinforce the silence of the
past, and is for all intents and purposes incredibly “short sighted” and also precludes the
“profound opportunities for educating a highly confused culture to its sexuality” and to stop
demeaning the gay population in dance and instead acknowledge and celebrate their
contribution (2001, p. 58). And more importantly states Risner (2001), by removing this
“insidious theme of cultural silence and denial about homosexuality” will ultimately pave the
way towards eradicating what historically existed in dance – “a rigid and insensitive training,
the inhumane treatment of dancers, the idealisation and mandate of particular body types,
rampant eating disorders that result from such body idealisations, excessive drug use by
dancers and sexual harassment and abuse suffered by dancers by those in positions of
authority” (p. 60). He makes a strong case for a total revamp of the dance education system
that currently exists in the USA.

Risner’s (2009) Stigma and Perseverance in the Lives of Boys Who Dance seek to
understand “more about boys who study dance seriously and decide to pursue professional
careers” (p. 2). This research seeks to extend his themes of privilege and marginalisation
(from his PhD thesis) and to obtain some understanding of the “emotional demands and
personal intensity of telling my own complicated story, whose details went beyond my
technical and performance experience” and to bring this to bear upon this research with
“young males in the particular place, space and time of their dance training” (Risner, 2009,
p. 3). He is also calling upon all the other sources of his own research (including surveys, interviews, and focus groups with male dance students) over the past ten years with “male dancers from diverse pre-professional contexts across the United States” which focussed on the “descriptions, meanings, and lived experiences of males in dance study, training and education” (Risner, 2009, p. 4).

Risner’s (research) three primary goals were (2009, p. 5):

1. A “theoretical examination of social issues in dance including aspects of gender, masculinity and sexuality”,
2. The “identification and synthesis of past and current literature investigating the ways in which male youth in dance experience social stigmatisation, heterocentric and gender bias, homophobia, limited access and social isolation”, and
3. The “dissemination and analysis of the findings of an extensive mixed methods study of male youth in pre professional dance training programs in the U.S.”

What is distinctive and informative in this research is goal number three, and it is these findings I believe inform my own research. Although my research is not as extensive to cover dance programs all over Australia, a concerted attempt was made by me to try to get a group of dancers from diverse and different backgrounds and experience levels (see the section on the sample in Chapters two and six). Despite the difference(s) a review of the findings would inform this research extensively.

What we can learn from Risner (2009) is that the “dominant masculinity, one that society repeatedly imposes on boys and young males” has consequential results whereby “perseverance is necessary for male students pursuing dance study and a career in dance”. This dominant masculinity (a social and cultural construct) guides “dance profession’s practice and research for all students” and more significantly influences “our teaching language” thereby gives privilege to “traditional masculine ways of knowing - individual achievement, emotional reserve, gender conformity and perfection” (pp. 50-51).
Many male adolescents have to “confront negative stereotypes and social isolation outside the dance studio” whereas “inside the studio” they may also be confronted with “teachers, directors and peers” sometimes using “homophobic language in order to emphasise the importance of adhering to strictly masculine behaviour, gesture and movement execution”, a form of “internalised homophobia” which can manifest itself for the male adolescent as “internal shame and low self worth” (Risner, 2009, p. 54). For many of these males this “resisting of cultural norms” begins early in life as they have to negotiate “homophobic stereotypes held by their own families and peers” which in turn helps to condition their own negative (perceptions and) preconceptions of male dancers as they contemplate and begin dance study (Risner, 2009, p. 57).

In addition, Risner’s research shows that “boys in pre-professional dance training often report feelings of being different or being perceived as different...and these feelings include feeling different in one’s own family, especially with fathers, brothers and other male relatives (2009, p. 75). Risner (2009) states that for boys in dance, they are “participating in an activity that already sheds social suspicion on their masculinity and heterosexuality” but for gay male youths in dance they are forced to confront a more “complicated dilemma – of being marginal in a marginalised field” (p. 60). What is even more interesting, explains Risner (2009), is that “young gay males in dance appear to experience more alienation in dance class than their straight male peers” and they may “also develop internalised homophobia in which self hate, low self esteem, destructive behaviour and further confusion” underlying their attitudes and conduct (p. 61). For many of these youth, they see no option but to be closeted (not to disclose their homosexuality) and this form of deception states Risner “ultimately leads to deceiving one’s self, a deception that may well go beyond sexual orientation and the dance studio” (2009, pp. 62-63).

The seminal findings in Risner’s research are: an understanding and appreciation of the fact that regardless (heterosexual or otherwise) studying dance brings “sexual orientation
to the forefront of male dancers’ social experiences” and that for “adolescent gay and bisexual males, studying dance appears to facilitate greater ownership of their non-heterosexual identity” and that these gay and bisexual males are five times more likely to indicate the need for more male dance instructors” (Risner, 2009, p. 119). What is significant and even critical is the insight and understanding that there are different ways of being and knowing (socially, culturally, and also in terms of sexuality), and that for boys, male adolescents, and adult males, our reinforcement of the traditional ‘dominant masculinity’ as proposed by Risner can have very deep mental, physical and psychological impact(s) on these individuals. It is these facts that critically inform my research.

Risner (2009) also extends this knowledge from his research to incorporate it into the teaching of dance. He feels strongly that “we may need to investigate our own gendered teaching and language, and look carefully at whether or not our pedagogies encourage or discourage expressive and physical male dancing in our studios and programs” to give us a heightened awareness of “hidden curriculum in our own teaching” (August, p. 5). Risner (2009) also advocates that as teachers we must “take seriously the enormous responsibility for someone else’s learning...for developing cultural understanding” and that dance pedagogy must address the issues of “marginalisation, privilege, prejudice, equity, and social justice” (June, p. 6). In this issue my research is distinguished.

### 3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have attempted to present the varied and sometimes disparate sources that inform the research I have carried out. It can be viewed as having a number of distinct parts to it. In the first part (Section 3.1), I presented a discussion about dance itself, and why we do it as a life activity. I began by looking at what dance is…especially its aesthetic and kinaesthetic qualities. I then proceeded to look at dance from an educational standpoint (Section 3.2) with its strong emphasis on phenomenology, especially in tertiary education. The Russian tradition in ballet and dance training cannot be overlooked, and I reviewed the
influence of the Russian tradition, in the form of the Ballet Russes, and its impact on the
teaching of ballet in schools in the UK and in Australia.

The next section (3.4) looked specifically at dance as a profession, and how dancers’
progress from the position of *corps de ballet* to *soloists, principals* and/or eventually to rise to
the position of *stars*. Section 3.5 looked at dance and men in particular, addressing issues and
concepts of masculinity in relation to national cultures, and what impact that had on people
from differing nationalities and cultures pursuing dance as a career.

Section 3.6 served to locate my research, in terms of the other research already carried
out, in various dance related psychological studies. As my research focussed on gay male
dancer/choreographers, it was inevitable that I looked at the issues of gender and sexual
identity, which were discussed in Section 3.6 and 3.7 respectively. These sections looked at
gender as a social and psychological construct, and the related psychological issues relating to
growing up and obtaining a sexual identity. Section 3.8 addressed the issues of dance and
(homo)sexual identity specifically. Section 3.9 looked at how dancers and choreographers
addressed their sexuality and sexual identity in their dance and the dances they
choreographed. Some chose to keep their sexuality and sexual identity out of their dancing
while many others chose not to sidestep their sexuality in their dancing and choreographing.

I concluded this chapter by looking at the work of two researchers. One was
conducted in Australia, which looked at men and dance, and men in dance. This piece of
research, although similar in content, was quite different in its intent and methodology. It was
important to draw out the distinction so as to distinguish my research. The next researcher
conducted all of his work in the United States and based them on the experiences of gay male
dancers in the USA. What was particularly informative (about these studies) was the fact that
the results he obtained were quite similar to those I obtained in my research, despite the fact
that his research was conducted in the USA. It does raise the question as to whether the
nature of dance training is universal (across different countries) without a cultural component,
and whether the experiences of male dancers share similarities despite having to traverse national boundaries.
Creativity cannot be kept inside; what one feels must come out.  

*Vincent Van Gogh, 1888*

**CHAPTER 4 RESULTS – CRITICAL INCIDENTS**

This chapter begins with an extract from the film *Billy Elliot* (Brenman, Finn & Daldry, 2000). The scene is particularly relevant at this juncture, as Billy has just been found out by his father to have been attending ballet classes, instead of the boxing classes he was supposed to have been attending during that time. This conversation between Billy Elliot (BE) and his father (BF) takes place over the dining table, in the kitchen of their home in Durham, in Northern England; with Billy’s grandmother (BG) also seated at the table.

**BF:** Ballet...

**BE:** What’s wrong with ballet?

**BF:** What’s wrong with ballet? …

**BE:** It’s perfectly normal…

**BF:** Perfectly…normal!

**BG:** I used to go to the ballet…

**BE:** See

**BF:** That’s your Nanna…for girls…its not, not for lads…lads do football, or boxing or wrestling…

**BE:** What lads do wrestling?

**BF:** Don’t start Billy…

**BE:** I don’t see what’s wrong with it!

**BF:** Yes…yes you do

**BE:** No, I don’t…

**BF:** Yes…you do

**BE:** No, I don’t

**BF:** You bloody well do…who do you think I am? Yes…you know quite nicely
BE: What are you trying to say Dad?

BF: You’re askin’ for a hidin’ son

BE: No, I’m not….honest

BF: You are…Billy…Billy

BE: It’s not just poofs… ballet dancers are as quick as athletes…what about that Wayne Sleep? …he was a ballet dancer

BF: Wayne…Sleep…

BE: Ay…

BF: From now on you will forget about the fuckin’ ballet…and about the fuckin’ boxing as well…I’m bustin’ my arse for those 50p and you…you’ll stay here and look after your Nanna…got that!

BG: Who knows…I could have been a ballet dancer

BF: Just shut it!

BE: I hate you! …you’re a bastard!

Although this dialogue is based on a script written for the producers of the film, its roots lie in reality, as the real Billy Elliot is in fact Philip Mosley, a dancer with the Royal Ballet (Sciolino, 2001) and “it is his life that you see on the screen” (Sciolino, 2001, p. 2). The Administrative Director of the Royal Ballet, Anthony Russell-Roberts, stated “I think Philip did have a material impact on the way the story was shaped and perhaps gave it its credibility” and the screen writer, Lee Hall, also stated “it was fascinating to talk to him because the details of his life that he shared with me paralleled the story I had written” (Sciolino, 2001, p. 2). “What’s so exciting about the film is that it put the spotlight on the fact that there are people who are coming from humble origins and they have really made it” states Russell-Roberts, and “it is absolutely the case that there is much more interest on behalf of potential male dancers” (Sciolino, 2001, p. 3).
This is the main reason why I view this research as relevant and timely. The people I interviewed have come from humble origins, and what we can learn from their lives can be of great interest in creating and transforming this wealth of potential male dancers into dancers of the future, a means of investing today in the cultural assets of tomorrow. This leads into the essence of this chapter – the results section of this study. In this chapter, I discuss the results obtained from the analysis of the data relating to the primary (main) research question:

What critical events impacted the lives of these male dancers and/or choreographers, and why these events were perceived as being critical by the individuals who directly experienced them?

As part of the pre-interview process, I requested the respondents to write a list of critical events they felt had an impact and/or influence on their lives, and the direction in which their lives had turned out. To avoid introducing any bias (on my part) into the research, I also made a request of the respondents to inform me why they considered these events were critical for them. In the first part of this chapter, I provide a discussion of the reasons why the respondents found these events critical. The sections that follow after look at the critical events themselves, and I consider these under the headings of personally and professionally related events.

The analysis is based on data obtained directly from personal interviews of respondents undertaken for this research. The referencing method used is based on transcripts (verbatim) of the personal interviews that were carried out. The method of referencing created for this chapter reads as follows, for example, (R1, 1/1, L 20-22) refers to Respondent number 1, Interview 1, Day 1, Lines 20 to 22.
4.1 CRITICAL INCIDENTS – THE WHY

Cohen and Smith (1976) state that “a majority of groups have to deal at one time or another with certain basic problems i.e. critical incidents, then an attempt should be made to systematise and deal with these issues to promote effective group development” (p. 118). The attempt here must be to try to recognise and describe the salient features of these critical events, and then, to try and prescribe a systematic approach to dealing with these events appropriately (Cohen & Smith, 1976, p. 118), which will be synthesised from the way the respondents interviewed, identified, described and handled these critical events.

By using this approach, I am endeavouring to study the activities undertaken by the respondents to “obtain a record of specific behaviours from those in the best position to make the necessary observations and evaluations” and to provide a list of critical behaviours that will provide a sound basis for “making inferences as to requirements in terms of aptitudes, training and other characteristics” (Cohen & Smith, 1976, pp. 119-120). This section deals with the primary research question:

What are the critical events that impacted the lives of these male dancers and/or choreographers, and why are these events perceived as being critical by the individuals who directly experienced them?

I begin the section by dealing with the reasons attributed by the respondents, as to why they considered the events they listed and discussed as being critical.

One of the first and the most obvious reason for citing these events as critical is the fact that these events were “life altering” and they were “things that changed your life, or changed your perspective on life” (R7, 1/1, L 270-271). Respondent 6 iterated similar sentiments and chose the words “turning corners in your life” and “you suddenly change your direction” with a “very strong change of direction” (1/2, L 75-81). Allied to this was the fact that these events were turning points to a new path in the life and career (R5, 1/1, L 476-492)
and having “an impact on my life in some way” and also on the development of my life and career” (R7, 1/1, L 277-280).

Respondents 4 and 5 talked of these critical events as having a strong connection with and being related to their being able to dance and to being involved with dance. Respondent 5 emphasised his enjoyment of music from an early age was critical in his pursuit of dance (2/1, L 27-30), whilst Respondent 4 stated these events allowed him to dance, and for him to dance meant a “release of your soul and your spirit” (1/1, L 38), which allowed him to feel accomplished with the “total satisfaction of my being” and helped him not to “feel as if it was a lonely existence” (1/1, L 53-70). It offered him the chance to be a professional and feel challenged professionally (R4, 1/2, L 698-719). Dancing, for him; was also instinctive and absorbing in that “I was just anxious to do it. I was like a blotting paper” (R4, 1/1, L 884-885).

For Respondent 3, these critical events represented times of emotional upheaval, with him feeling that he just had to survive “the emotional aftermath” (R3, 1/1, L 600-602) of such events. The death of his father, and the subsequent loss of his mother through her suicide (R3, 1/1, L 469, 590) represented moments of high emotion, because as individuals we are all dependant on our parents. This emotional dependency he did find for a time with the Artistic Director of the Company, but lost this support with the change of Artistic Directorship (R3, 1/1, L 661-664). He later showed a stronger sense of emotional independence when he felt that there was “no time to waste” and left the dance company to be with his partner overseas—in Europe (R3, 1/1, L 616-620).

Respondent 2 on the other hand viewed these critical events in relation to the “geographical demarcations that they had in terms of the impact…on my life” (2/1, L 9–16). Some of the reasons for the relocation were “relatively random” or “have been prompted by factors external to my own control” (R2, 2/1, L 25-26). Respondent 1 discussed similar reasons in that he felt he had to make decisions by the sheer force of circumstance, where “at
certain points in your life…you have to choose one” (1, L 815-816), rather than through careful deliberation.

In other circumstances, both Respondents 1 and 2 stated that they were afforded opportunities where they could make deliberate choices in terms of their life and career. Respondent 1 broke away from dance altogether by choosing a career outside the performing arts by entering the field of real estate and then followed that up with something he felt passionate about – education (1, L 831-832, 929-932). Shifts in the socio-political context and artistic challenges were the sources attributed by Respondent 2 for his deliberate choices to move from one country to another (2/1, L 27, 32-46, 276-279).

Finally, one of the prime reasons for viewing these events as critical for two respondents was the freedom it afforded them in their lives. For one of them, it allowed the opportunity to escape from his family (R1, 2/2, L 412-414), to leave behind the “provincialism and parochialism of Ireland” (R1, 3, L 577-578), and “to be himself and escape all the bullying” (R1, 3, L 533) he had experienced, thus, affording him physical, mental, and emotional freedom. Respondent 3 on the other hand, in a show of freedom, took some time off in the middle of his career to experience and explore new things and places (1/1, L 622).

The reasons why these events were viewed as critical by the respondents were many and varied. It was not always possible to categorise them as either personally or professionally related, as in most cases, I could argue in favour of the dual categorisation. In this instance the use of personal and professional did not enhance the analysis.

4.2 CRITICAL INCIDENTS – PERSONAL

For this part of the analysis, relating to the critical incidents, I will be analysing the relationship between the respondents and their critical incidents in terms of their effects, both professionally and personally. I begin by considering those events which affected them personally.
4.2.1 Family

These particular events are closely related to the family – the location of the family home, their subsequent relocation, how the family was raised, what emphasis religion played, the family environment itself, the effects their parents had on their lives, and the assistance and support afforded to them by their parents and family.

4.2.1.1 Family religion

Respondent 1 was the only respondent to mention the significant impact religion played in his early life, as he attended a Roman Catholic Secondary School (1, L 255-256). He identifies most with being a Roman Catholic, as he was brought up Roman Catholic (R1, 1, L 236-238) but does not identify with any organised religion in the current circumstance (R1, 1, L231-232). Respondent 1 admits most freely that he had at one stage considered joining the priesthood (1, L 262-263), and used to go quite regularly to a nearby church to pray during what he calls “my religious phase” (1, L 276). He even resorted to prayer to grant him his two wishes: one that he would not be gay, and the other, to get him entry into the Royal Ballet School (R1, 1, L 280-284).

Respondent 4 also mentions religion in his family upbringing. His parents were affiliated with the Church of England, and he “went to Sunday school from a very young age” (1/1, L 19-20). He emphasised that it did not play an important role in his life (R4, 1/1, L 19).

4.2.1.2 Family relocation

Respondent 3, does mention specifically where he was born and that the town he was born in was a “very depressing place” where “nothing much happens culturally” and where his parents moved, soon after he was born; to a much larger city – Christchurch (1/1, L 226-236). Respondent 2, on the other hand, although born in Liverpool (UK) was relocated to North London after his grandfather passed away (1/1, L 28-30). London, he felt, was a “lot more sophisticated” and where studying art and the arts were valid in school (R2, 1/1, L 51-
4.2.1.3 Family environment

Respondent 1 tells of the situation in his family home, especially his relationship with his father. To begin with, he cites there was a “lot of tension at home” and he being the youngest son, with four other siblings. There was lots of “squabbling and things like that” and that none of them really related to their dad – “he just had no relationship with us” (1, L 39-45).

Respondent 3 moved to Australia with his mother to train at a local dance school (1, L 358-359). At that point in time, his family environment was just him and his mother, who managed to get a job with a private school in Melbourne (1, L 381-382); and that the family structure changed when his older sister moved to Melbourne, and they chose to live together for a while (1, L 506-508). Respondent 6 cites family connections as the reason for his dancing in the first instance. His brother-in-law’s sister was enrolled in a ballet school and when he “expressed interest in dance, she took me along” (2/1, L 142). So an artistic family environment assisted with his interest in dance.

Respondent 7’s family environment and circumstances were unique in a number of different ways. To begin with he grew up in “a single parent family” and “as an only child” he was brought up in a “protective environment” and hence was a spoilt child (1/1, L 728-736). He was raised in a supportive atmosphere filled with many friends, most of whom were the children of his mother’s girlfriends, so in a sense it was a “big family environment” that was “very community oriented” (R7, 1/1, L 811-813). His mother got him involved in dance “to channel some of that energy” (R7, 2/1, L 89-90) he had from all the natural movement and gymnastics that he was doing as a child (R7, 2/1, L 14-15). He was raised always being told that he was “special” and “talented” (R7, 2/1, L 486-488), so it is hardly surprising to find out that he had a “very close relationship” with his mother (R7, 2/1, L 649-650).
4.2.1.4 Parental feelings

Respondent 1 expressed great regret about the way his father used to feel about his doing dance and taking up dance as a career. “He probably did...probably did feel ashamed of me” and “I mean he’d mock me...oh, off to the ballet, you know in a very sissy voice and stuff, and gave me hell about it” (2, L 282-284). This trend lasted until he was seventeen and when his dad was thinking “he’s still going, he’s still persevering, this isn’t just a sissy thing that’s going to pass” (R1, 2, L 287-288). In later years, this feeling did change but, alas, he still felt that his father “wished that I was doing something else” (R1, 2, L 292).

Respondent 3 had different experiences with his father. His father was a farmer and he “did not really have much of a relationship” with him (1, L 305-306). He felt his father never really understood him, but never stood in his way and he had “no recollection of him ever saying I couldn’t go” to dance classes (R3, 1, L 317-318). He “never felt there was much of a sense of connection” with his father (R3, 1, L 330-331).

Another respondent, stated his “father especially” was not very keen on him doing dance classes, while his mother neither objected not supported them (R6, 1/1, L 130-141). He felt that his parents were not necessarily inclined towards pushing their male sons into the theatre (R6, 1/1, L 144-145). He was supposed to fulfil the dreams of his father who never made it to university, and he was hopeful “that one of his sons would be able to do what he wasn’t” (R6, 1/1, L 396-398).

4.2.1.5 Parental assistance

Some of the respondents interviewed found their parents did provide some form of assistance in helping them on their way to a dancing career. Respondent 4 realised the sacrifices made by his parents who were farmers when “they had scrimped and saved very incredibly hard and bought a beautiful piano for we three children to learn music” (R4, 1/1,
Respondent 6 was much younger at the time, but he “just grew to love the piano” (R6, 1/1, L 270-271), but less than a year later, he was faced with the choice of either pursuing to learn to play the piano or dance, and he chose the latter (R6, 1/1, L 281-282).

Respondent 5 was fortunate in that his family was, right from the start, supportive of his wanting to dance, seeing as how three of his other siblings (sisters) started dancing at the same time (1/1, L 560-565). He found that his older brother was also extremely supportive of him, once “he knew that it was something I was good at and it was something I wanted to follow” (R5, 1/1, L 587-589). He was also fortunate in having members of his father’s family in the performing arts. His father’s cousin was a dancer who ended up at the Royal Ballet, and his father’s brother was also a dancer (R5, 2/1, L 11-13). He was lucky to have a really close family (R5, 2/1, L 143-144).

4.2.1.6 Parents death

No person’s life is spared the tragedy and trauma of death. That is the case here too. Respondent 3 had to go through the emotional trauma associated with the death of his parents. He had left home to attend dance school in Australia. While he was in his second year at the Australian Ballet School in 1985, his father was killed in a car accident in New Zealand (R3, 1, L 468-469). The impact of his death “just threw everything kind of up in the air” while his mum tried “to make sure that the impact was minimalised as much as possible” (R3, 1, L 1559-1564). His mother committed suicide in 1991, and that had a huge impact on his life (R5, 1, L 590-592). His mother's suicide was the result of bad health and pain over a long period of time (R5, 1/2, L 725-732). She had “a spinal infusion” carried out and “it was a botched job basically” resulting in a lot of pain (R5, 1/2, L 732-738). She was trying to get over the death of her husband and was prescribed “Valium as a muscle relaxant” which proved to be “terribly addictive” and attempts to reduce her medication proved quite difficult as she had become addicted to them (R5, 1/2, L 750-765). This resulted in depression, and she had to be admitted into hospital a number of times as “her body wasn’t processing
medication properly” (R5, 1/2, L 774-782). It was he believes a combination of all these things that resulted in his mother taking her own life, and was, as he had stated “much worse than we really thought, and that was it” (R5, 1/2, L 810-812). He found out later in life that his brother had been diagnosed with manic depression and that depression runs in the family (R5, 1/2, L 865-868), which might in some way explain the plight of his mother.

The family and its members are the single strongest personal influence on a person’s emotional and psychological well-being. It was with this in mind that I chose to begin with familial issues. No attempt was made here to present these events in any form of logical sequence. The presentation of events is based on the order of the data I obtained from my analysis. The next set of events relates to what started these individuals on their path towards a dance career.

4.2.2 Beginning dance

Respondents 2 and 4 started off with social dancing. Respondent 2 started formal dancing lessons as it was “inherent in our social environment” and it was also “inherent that we take part in it” (1, L 26-27). Respondent 4 remembers going to social dances with his parents at the local Soldiers Memorial Hall built after World War I (1, L 840-841). They were all taken to the local dances “right from childhood” as there were no babysitters to look after the children (R4, 1, L 9-10). He loved to dance, and was joining in the dances by the time he was 5 years of age and took to it “like a duck to water” (R4, 1, L11-13). He had learned to dance by watching people dance or what he calls “pick it up by watching” (R4, 1, L 855) and that he “could always pick things up quickly” (R4, 1, L 864). He likened himself and his ability for dance this way – “I was like blotting paper” (R4, 1, L 884-885). He started dancing with his sisters as partners (R4, 1, L 158), and had the “killer instinct” for dance at a very early age (R4, 1, L 191-194). Another respondent states that moving to a much larger city opened up a multitude of possibilities for him. At age four and a half, he was already attending school, taken up horse riding and ballet training (R3, 1, L 242-247).
Respondent 4 also cites the viewing of performances by professional dance companies as providing the strong impetus for his strong desire to want to dance. He started off by viewing traditional English pantomime as a young child, while on a trip to Melbourne (1, L 185-187). After the family’s relocation into Melbourne, he would try and see as many shows as he could but his first encounter with a classical dance company was the Ballet Rambert (BR) (R4, 1, L 236-242) and it was the first time a British company had come to Australia (R4, 1, L 253). It was this company’s production of *Giselle* that inspired him to want to do classical dance, as it was “just so different to anything I’d seen in musical comedy” with the male dancers “in tights” and the female dancers were in “tutus or classical gowns” (R4, 1, L 1067-1071).

Respondent 5 remembers clearly and vividly how he got started in dance at the age of eight (1, L 502). He had accompanied his female cousin to a dance class, which was held in a local youth club (R5, 1, L 510-511) and he was the only male in the class that day ((R5, 1, L 519). He was sent to this dance class because the family felt he was “an artistic child” and that it would appeal to him (R5, 1, L 41). Despite the fact he did not enjoy the first class, he developed a keener interest in dance when he felt that his teacher thought he had “some ability and took a strong interest in encouraging me” (R5, 1, L 541-544).

Respondent 7’s involvement in dance came about from his love of tumbling and acrobatics which he was doing “from age 8 or 9” (1, L 773). He did it because he enjoyed doing it to music, and “whenever I put music on I dance” (R7, 1, L 786-787). This yearn to dance came at a high cost for him. He was the “only male to dance in the town”, as he was the only boy in the jazz dance class, which caused a lot of problems for him at school, as he was “teased quite a lot” and he “used to run away, used to run home” (R7, 1/1, L 842-843).

Respondent 3 was rather blasé about how he started dancing. For him, “at age four and a half” (R3, 1/1, L 259), he started school, horse riding and ballet training all at the same time (R3, 1/1, L 244), but it was only a class once a week (R3, 1/1, L 261). This routine
followed him through so much so that by the age of twelve he would “get up at about six
thirty, do my homework, go to school…get picked up, eat in the car, go horse riding…get
back into the car, eat again and go to ballet (R3, 1/1, L 271-276). It was quite a hectic life for
a boy so young but as he puts it “I was kind of quite, quite a persuasive person even then,
when I was little” (R3, 1/1, L 251-252).

4.2.3 Leaving home

For many the enjoyment of dance and the pursuit of the study of dance also meant
leaving home to join a ballet school. Only three respondents identified this as being a critical
incident for them. For two of the respondents, getting into the prestigious RBS was
important, especially for one of them who had to leave home in Ireland to attend the RBS in
London.

Attending the RBS in London was not really a daunting experience for this respondent
as he had been to Paris before, and had successfully navigated his way around the city (R1, 3,
L541-553). “So I had no trouble ever in London. I was never sort of daunted and London was
never daunting for me” (R1, 3, L 553-555). He used to “miss the family”, missed the sea”
and “missed the dog” but he felt that he “could take care” of himself and was glad to “get
away from the provincialism and parochialism of Ireland” (R1, 3, L 560-578).

Respondent 2 echoes similar sentiments. For him the move to the Royal Ballet School
was a far cry from the school he attended. This move meant he was in a school where
everyone was “studying ballet” and he felt that he was put in a “supported environment” for
people with their ability (R2, 1, L68–69). Interpersonal “communication was easier” and he
did not have to “feel intimidated or fear reprisals from other boys” (R2, 1, L 70-71).

Respondent 3 knew as soon as he had completed his Higher School Certificate that he
had wanted to pursue a career in dance (1, L 111-112). He had auditioned for the VCA, got
accepted, but he decided not to go (R5, 1, L 177), instead he studied ballet for three months
before heading off to the Australian Ballet School in Melbourne to do a Diploma in Dance instead (R5, 1, L 282-286).

It is at this point that we leave the arena of dance and dance training, to focus on the individuals themselves, their personal outlook/choices, their politics, their sexuality and related issues and finally, a life altering tragedy.

4.2.4 Personal choices

In this section, only two people make specific comments about their choice to want to dance. One recounts the choice he had to make after being counselled that if he really wanted to succeed he had to “choose one or the other” that is between music and dance (R4, 1, L 282). His teacher wanted him to choose music as he had what she termed “a lovely touch” but he chose differently (R4, 1, L 286). This strong sense of musicality is a great ingredient in making a good dancer (R4, 1, L 296-299). Respondent 6 while studying dance in NYC managed to get a job at the Australian Consulate. This provided him with a public service salary, and afforded him the benefits of a Diplomatic visa, which for all intents and purposes allowed him an indefinite stay in the city as long as he worked for the Consulate (R6, 1, L 496-507). Despite all these luxuries, it was in some way a trap for him (R6, 1, L 515-523), he returned to Australia after a romance ended bitterly.

Respondent 1 felt strongly about his choice to dance, as it afforded him the opportunity to leave home to explore other communities and outlooks. To begin with, he had always felt different from “other members of his family” and more importantly he certainly felt different from his dad (R1, 2, L 93-94). This sense of feeling different and apartness, coupled with his love for dance, was a form of escape for him. “Going to dance classes, going to ballet, and watching ballets and, I mean I used to go to the opera and symphony as well, and really any reason to get out of the house” (R1, 2, L 127-130). The move to London to attend the RBS afforded him the luxury and escape of being “amongst professional dancers and training with dancers” (R1, 2, L 134-135). This was an escape from the “alternative of
living at home” (R1, 2, L 136). There was also an element of running away to prove a point. He would prove them (his family) all wrong, he could “earn perhaps money doing this” and it was “my turn to gloat at them, and I was running away from all of that, all of the pressure, you know, it was a sort of release” (R1, 2, L 370-378).

4.2.5 Socio-political changes

Only one respondent highlighted the changing global circumstance as having distinct effects on his life. These changing circumstances were in the socio-political arena. He was working in Hong Kong as Artistic Director of a company there, and felt he was “stagnating somewhat” in his artistic development (R2, 2/1, L 259-260). But, it took the incident at Tiananmen Square (where people were fighting for their civil rights) to prompt him to consider the future of the ballet company and his place in Hong Kong. He then chose to go to South Africa to work as Artistic Director of a company after that. Despite the fact that the job there was artistically challenging (R2, 2/1, L 277-279), in the first year, the challenges in the second year proved to be quite overpowering altogether (R2, 2/1, L 281-284). The people in South Africa were getting frustrated and that led to violence in many instances, so much so fear for his own safety was becoming a real concern (R2, 2/1, L 288-304). He felt that the only way out was for him to step down and let a Black African head the programme (R2, 2/1, L 310-312). The country was at the point of political turmoil, which was the exact situation facing him in Hong Kong (R2, 2/1, L 337). His last move resulting from a political agenda was his move to New Zealand, which allowed him to be reunited with his gay partner (R2, 2/1, L 548-549). He felt very strongly about the discrimination he felt in England, instituted by the British Government against same sex relationships (R2, 2/1, L 609-611), causing him to move once again to a country with a more tolerant attitude and allowing him to live with his partner.
4.2.6 Sexuality issues

This leads on to the next issue of sexuality and its impact on the lives of the respondents.

4.2.6.1 Acknowledging and coming out

Respondent 1 stated he knew “when he went to London that one day the closet would open and I would just fall out” (R1, 2, L 526-527). He did not come out until he left the Ballet School despite the feelings he had for his classmate, as he was far too fearful then to act on them (R1, 2, L 533-536). He did not have a suitable gay role model at ballet school so coming out was an even more difficult proposition (R1, 2, L 537-538, 549-550). Respondent 2 was aware of his sexuality at a much earlier age, “between the ages of 10 to 12” while still at a local state school in London and “it became stronger” (R2, 1, L 65-66).

Another respondent was clear as to how he came out (acknowledging his sexuality openly). He came out first to his family and that he felt “was big” (R3, 1, L518-519). He did this with the express intention that he “did not want any blocks between myself and my family...I felt there was no time to beat around the bush” and being “honest just had so much more importance then” (R3, 1, L535-538). He felt that because a lot of his friends at school were gay and were good friends with Mum” he felt comfortable to coming out to his mum first (R3, 1, L 543-545).

Respondent 4 felt that once you were in a company being gay was not a real issue, it was all part of a family, or what he chooses to call “the extension of the family concept” (R4, 1/1, L 616-617). He also states that his sexuality had no impact on his choice of career (R4, 1/1, L 652-654). Respondent 6 learned from an early age of fourteen that he was (gay) homosexual (1/3, L 1151-1155). He did feel some regret that he would not lead what most people perceive as a normal life (R6, 1/3, L 1179). He had a few years “to come to terms with
it” until the age of eighteen and he was okay with getting into a dance career, as being gay there “wasn’t so unusual” (R6, 1/3, L 1205-1208).

Respondent 7 made the claim that his being gay was not a real issue in the dance world. The dance world he found, was “very supportive” of his sexuality, and made it more acceptable and comfortable (R7, 2/1, L 107-113). He makes the point that dance is “just so much physical contact” and it is a “physical thing”, so you “live and breathe it with these people, so it’s hard not to build bonds...and those closeness” (R7, 2/1, L 124-143). He admits to having relationships with men at different times, and with men outside the company, just so he could get treated like a normal person (R7, 2/1, L 272-285). He makes a valid and legitimate point about dancers having same sex partners.

4.2.6.2 Having partners

Respondent 7 admits to having partners outside the dance company as being a form of escapism and allowing him to be treated as a normal person (R7, 2/1, L 272-285) but he also adds that he finds it “hard not to be attracted to anyone else but dancers” (R7, 2/1, L 293-295). He identifies the benefits associated to being in a relationship with someone outside the company “as having separate jobs and they come home and they spend time together so, then the time that we were able to spend together was quality time, and time that you enjoyed” (R7, 2/1, L 339-341).

Respondent 2 felt that being with his partner was so critical to his life that he chose to leave his home country to be in another, which was more tolerant politically, where he could be with his partner (R2, 2/1, L 527-529). His home country of England was far too homophobic (R2, 2/1, L 485) and far too politically discriminating (R2, 2/1, L 608-611). In the end he saw no choice but to move to be with his partner.

Respondent 3 moved away from his position at a professional dance company in order to pursue a relationship with another dancer who lived in Europe (R3, 1, L 617-618). This
was exacerbated by the experiences he had with his family (with both parents dying) and he also felt he was young enough with a certain amount of experience to make it possible (R3, 1, L 618-625). He worked in Basel (Switzerland) for a year but came back to a position at his previous dance company for two reasons namely his relationship overseas had ended and the job he had there was not what he was looking for (R3, 1, L 646-650). He subsequently met someone else from the company and they moved in together in 1994, acknowledging he was outing his personal life ahead of his professional life (R3, 1, L 652-655).

Respondent 6’s experience with relationships was a little different that lead him to a different path altogether. Despite finding his move to the ballet in Western Australia and finding the situation there “fairly hopeless” he stayed there nonetheless, because of this new relationship, and started to teach at the company and that “seemed to have a little bit of a reputation” (R6, 1/2, L 351-353). Subsequently many years later, he pursued another relationship with a man in Sydney despite his being in Melbourne. This was an expensive relationship with regards to flying to Sydney to be with the man, but that relationship ended as the man was an alcoholic (R6, 1/2, L 1441-1444). That relationship lasted only eight months as he was trying to run a relationship with someone who was, in addition, “terrified of settling down” (R6, 1/2,L 1492-1496). He so wanted the relationship in Sydney to work out as he saw it as a chance of moving back and “going home to Sydney”. That was not to be, and he remains in Melbourne to this day.

4.2.7 Disability to differently abled

Physical injury is quite common with professional dancers and when it occurs it can take long periods of time to recover, requiring extensive physiotherapy, surgery, and Pilates training. In this instance recovery is possible. One respondent in particular, had a really horrific traffic accident (while he was dancing in South Africa) and this resulted in a radical change of life for him.
The most radical change brought about by the accident was the fact that he does not see himself “as a sexual being now...Not really. Not since my accident” (R7, 1/2, L 320-325). What is even more interesting is the relationship he perceives between being sexual and the loss of his body – what he calls the changes in his “body and physique” (R7, 1/2, L 324). He states that although he longs to have intimate sexual relationships but “coming from the whole dancing background of seeing yourself physically, and I don’t see myself as a physically attractive person now” (R7, 1/2, L 332-338). The accident not only took away his body, but also took his sexuality and sexual identity away from him.

From a physical point of view though, this respondent had come a long way from being an able bodied person and dancer, to a disabled person and finally to the recognition that he is a differently abled person and dancer. He states that he always had a “very, very strong sense of direction”, which took him to dance with a professional dance company in South Africa, which caused him to ask himself why he keeps “moving away from things...my comfort zone, leave my familiarities, leave loved ones, um, leave what I’ve built up, you know” (R7, 1/2, L 1027-1062). He even moved to New York City to dance later in his life (R7, 1/2, L 1047).

While he was dancing in South Africa he was content. He was “in love with a great person”, in love “with the country”, and in love with “what I was doing” and “felt complete” (R7, 1/2, L 1136-1138). He relates what a horrendous experience it was to be transported back to Australia in a plane lying flat on his back in a stretcher, with people staring at me which made it such “a horrible experience” (R7, 1/2, L 1199-1202). The after-effects of the accident meant a “total change of lifestyle and learning, learning new things...totally different” (R7, 1/2, L 1199-1202 ) which is what you would expect after being told that he was “never gonna walk again”( R7, 1/2, L 1174). For him this experience meant it was a total lack of control and a loss of “self dignity” (R7, 1/2, L 1324-1331).
From there, he moved onto recovery, and it was during that time he began to realise that the “first thing” he was craving for was the “need to dance”, well before the need to choreograph (R7, 1/3, L 21-24). He also realised that after his return to Australia he was very much “in a state of shock” (R7, 1/3, L 91) to begin with, and with little understanding of what it meant to “have a spinal cord injury” (R7, 1/3, L 108). While he was receiving rehabilitation, he began to realise the full extent of what he had lost, and “losing that movement and being physical was one, one of the hardest things” (R7, 1/3, L 331-332). While at rehabilitation, he rediscovered movement and dance when he “started improving and started to get more mobility” in his upper limbs and gradually more strength, which allowed him to “see a bit of light” at the end (R7, 1/3, L 334-337).

After six months of rehabilitation, he returned “back into society again” with what he saw as a ‘different identity’ (R7, 1/3, L 353-355) and a ‘different approach to life’ (R7, 1/3, L 388). This new approach to life was borne out of the realisation of how “to make the most of our lives” because it “could be ended in a matter of seconds, like mine almost did” (R7, 1/3, L 372-377).

He started to experience life again but with a different perception and perspective (R7, 1/3, L 423-430), but still yearned to be seen as “standing up ... I was a dancer, I danced with.... I was very clear telling where I came from, and that I hadn’t always been like this...I really wanted to prove that they that I hadn’t always been in a wheelchair” (R7, 1/3, L 430-445). A chance meeting by his friends with a dancer in New York City changed life for this respondent, and “she was the woman who showed me that I could dance again, and if I wanted to dance, she could show me” (R7, 1/3, L 507-508). With the training he received from her in NYC, he said he “stopped seeing my disability and started to look at my abilities” in dancing and choreography (R7, 1/3, L 705-706).

This concludes the section which addressed the events that impacted on the respondents in a personal way.
4.3 CRITICAL INCIDENTS – PROFESSIONAL

In this next section, I will consider critical events which made an impact or had an impact on the respondents’ professional lives. These factors range from their early dance training, to the training they received at dance school, then to their first jobs in a company, and finally to being offered new challenges at these companies. I also look at the achievements these respondents made and also their foray into the world of choreography. The issues to follow include the management at these companies and the mentoring some of them received while at these companies. I look at some of the setbacks they encountered, the job opportunities some pursued, and then to look at some of them moving on away from a dance career altogether. I end the section by looking at how one respondent tackles a dance career from a totally different and challenging professional outlook.

4.3.1 Beginning to dance

Respondent 3’s beginning with the studying of dance at a professional level took place at a summer ballet course when he met with the Ballet Master of the AB Company (1, L 336-339). The Ballet Master saw his potential and talked with his parents about letting him try out for the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA). He auditioned for the College, got accepted, and moved to Australia with his mother in 1984 (R3, 1, L 356-359). While still a student at the VCA, he took a boy’s ballet class with another teacher at the National Theatre Ballet School (NTBS) (R3, 1, L 410-412), and it was upon this teacher’s instigation that he moved from the VCA to the Australian Ballet School (ABS) where this teacher taught dance full time (R3, 1, L 434-435). The teacher taught private classes at the NTBS on Friday nights only (R3, 1, L 434-435). Even at a young age of fourteen, he was accepted into the ABS without having to do the “general audition”. He just “went and did the class with the school and basically they took me for the following year 1985” (R3, 1, L 441-443).
Another respondent vividly remembers his first ballet class. He joined a ballet class where “there was only one other boy in the class” (R4, 1/1, L 398-399), and felt very embarrassed because he “really didn’t know just what I was going to have to do next” (R4, 1/1, L 402-403). He also “felt strange having a jock strap and tights on and ballet shoes and shirt” which was something he had never put on before in his life (R4, 1/1, L 404-405). He did feel intimidated but he was also determined (R4, 1/1, L 412-413). He also states that at that point in time, training to dance just meant “learning the techniques” as “boys were scarce in those days” and did not have to go through the same tough selection they have to do now (R4, 1/2, L 418-434). He was categorical about the fact the only reason why he went to those dance classes was because he had sincerely wanted to make dance his full time career (R4, 1/2, L 479-482). This he knew when he started his ballet classes at age sixteen (R4, 1/1, L 396).

Respondent 6 started ballet classes at a young age, but suspended doing them for a number of different reasons namely: he was “intimidated by the ballet teacher” and was “frightened to go back” because he had “missed a few classes” (1/2, L 25-27). It all seemed for him to be much easier on “the family situation and the school situation...just drop it” (R6, 1/2, L 30-32). What restarted or rekindled his interest again was the discovery “that I loved it and I was good at it...felt that I needed to, you know, get the academic work out of the way before going back to” dance (R6, 1/2, L 14-16). But, it was “far too late” for that, and he went back to dancing after completing a year at university (R6, 1/2, L 17, 72).

4.3.2 Ballet training

One respondent found his training at the Royal Ballet School (RBS) difficult to handle as he felt the “strictness at the RBS was petty” and he was “older than anyone else” in his class (R1, 2, L 429-432). As a result of this fact and a whole host of other related issues, he chose to leave the RBS after completing only two years. The reasons he attributed for his
departure were, in addition to the petty discipline, was the loss of a really good and supportive male dance teacher (R1, 3, L 376-412), a change of three teachers in three months (R1, 3, L 421-422), being two years older than his peers in class (R1, 2, L 498-499), feeling he was getting too old for the place (R1, 3, L501), and finally, as he did not rise from ranks of the Junior School of the RBS, he felt he did not know “how to play the game” (R1, 3, L509-510).

Another found the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School (VCASS) comprised a “very strict regime” of training, which included technical training with the arms and legs having to be perfect, which was challenging for him (R7, 1/2, L 890-891). What was more challenging for him was the fact that his only parent (his mother) was working a lot to pay his fees at the school (R7, 1/1, L 920-922). It was also “extremely hard emotionally” for him to be away at a boarding school, being totally on his own, and being away from his mum (R7, 1/1, L 640-646) for the very first time in his life. Despite all these factors, while he was at school, and when he was dancing he stated “I really loved it...I really fitted in...I finally really felt like I fitted in...amongst people with similar interests” (R7, 1/1, L 707-710). He subsequently moved to the ABS after completing Year Twelve, and that says “felt like a natural progression” (R7, 1/1, L 782-783) and it was, he felt, the leading school for the training of dancers, with international recognition and he “wanted to go to the best” (R7, 1/1, L 811-813). More importantly, the “strict classical training” he was to receive at the ABS, he felt was the way into a “classical ballet company” which would afford him “a regular income” and “stability” (R7, 1/1, L 811-813). Ultimately, it was his training in classical dance – “learning the technique and technically becoming a stronger dancer” made him realise that he was ready to dance professionally, in a professional company (R7, 1/1, L 957-962).

Although he started learning the classical technique later in life (at age sixteen) than most other dancers, Respondent 4 felt that his training was very superior than most as he received “the full Russian training” and was taught good technique, theatricality, and good stage presence (R4, 1/1, L 430-432). Right from the start, he was taught what it was “like to
be on stage” and despite its “enormous discipline” it was “a brilliant company for its period” (R4, 1/1, L 433-437). After learning classical technique, he was accepted into the Borovansky Ballet (BB), a commercial company which relied on making money at the box office (R4, 1/1, L 477-479). Despite all this great training and joining a professional company, this respondent felt a strong need to go overseas to go and “measure himself against the people in the mother country” (Great Britain) which “was the norm” at the time (R4, 1/1, L 662-664). He travelled extensively through Europe (R4, 1/1, L 700-723), but returned to UK to dance with the Saddlers Wells Opera Company, the London City Ballet, and to dance for the Marquis De Cuevas Company at the London Coliseum (R4, 1/1, L 773-774).

Respondent 5 attended performances by the Sydney Dance Company (SDC) and was bitten by the bug. His feeling was that he did not have the classical background to “front up for an audition for a company like that” (R5, 1/1 L 661-664), so he started classical dancing at a much later age of nineteen, by auditioning for a ballet school (R5, 1/1 L 664-666). He tried to get work professionally in Sydney a year before that, with the hope of getting into musical theatre; but got frustrated with the work and decided to head back to school (R5, 1/1 L 651-659). This respondent auditioned and was accepted into the VCA, at the end of High School, but chose not to go there (R5, 1/2, L 174-178) so this time he auditioned for the ABS and was accepted (at age eighteen) into the Diploma of Dance programme (R5, 1/1 L 651-659). During the course of graduating from the ABS, he was assessed and at the same time auditioned for the Australian Ballet Company. He was not offered a contract with them at that time, but was given a contract with the Queensland Ballet (QB) (R5, 1/1, L 348-355, 362-369).

Respondent 6 started to dance early, gave it up in favour of University, but left University after completing only a year. He started attending the ABS but lasted for only a year, before heading to the UK. He felt he needed to attend the RBS, after being convinced by his dance teacher that “the only place to study was overseas”, so he enrolled at the RBS
He met a mentor and got a job with a professional company within six days of his arrival in London (R6, 1/2, L 91-109). He never attended the RBS and spent 20 months’ with the London Festival Ballet (LFB) and then returned to Australia to rejoin the ABS (R6, 1/2, L 191-198). After what was a rather tumultuous time overseas (R6, 1/2, L 132-133, 140-141), he returned and completed another year at the ABS, with a promise to be taken into the AB after he had been through “more training” (R6, 1/2, L 197-198).

4.3.3 Joining a professional company

Respondent 2 talks of being right at the “bottom of the heap” when he left dance school to join a professional ballet company (1/2, L 340-342), and he also found the structure at the dance company hierarchical to the point where cast listings on all programmes and media were listed alphabetically according to categories of dancers (1/2, L 385-386).

After graduating from the ABS, Respondent 3 who was already accepted into the Australian Ballet Company, wanted to spend some time overseas before commencing with the company. The Ballet Company organised for him and a friend to go overseas under the auspices of a scholarship programme which they had running for their staff (R3, 1, L560-567). They were able to travel on their own and “still meet up with people, the director, see performances, so it was almost like we were part of that scholarship programme” (R3, 1, L567-569). After returning from Europe in early 1988, he started dancing with the company and was fortunate enough to join them on his first overseas tour to the Soviet Union, Greece and the UK for over two months (R3, 1, L581-584). He rejoined the Ballet Company again, after spending a year abroad dancing with a European ballet company (R3, 1, L 644-646). His experience of joining a professional dance company is varied.

Respondent 4 was fortunate to be dancing before the creation and commencement of the Australian Ballet (AB). When it was formed, he became a founding member of the Ballet (1/2, L 1171-1172) and he describes it as a “non-commercial company, but, dancing internationally with great international stars” (1/1, L 490-492). He began his dancing career
when he joined the Borovansky Ballet (BB), a commercially run professional ballet company (R4, 1/1, L 477-479). His experience of joining a professional dance company was not just about technique, but it was more about “friendships and the bonds that you filled...the family, the concept of family, the bonds of friendship” (R4, 1/1, L 570-574). He adds further, he was always dancing with women, “pairing up...it is a physical thing, but it is also a very personal and intimate thing that you do” (R4, 1/1, L 600-602). He was fortunate that when he started ballet classes he was taught by Madame Borovansky who “taught the full Russian style” (R4, 1/2, L 531) and three years later he was offered a place at a professional dance company run by Mr Borovansky himself (R4, 1/1, L 689-692). It was his good fortune as “one boy had left suddenly” and he got a spot with the company (R4, 1/1, L 722).

The death of Mr Borovansky in 1959 (R4, 1/2, L 973-974), saw the demise of the BB and the start of what was to be the first permanent national company in Australia (R4, 1/2, L 973-974) and he was accepted into the new company as a soloist (R4, 1/2, L 1178-1180). He had joined the first company of the Australian Ballet, a permanent subsidised company, and it felt “motivating and exciting” for him to be involved with this “full time national company” (R4, 1/2, L 1204, 1247 & 1255). This respondent got the lead role in a ballet choreographed by Sir Robert Helpmann called The Display (R4, 1/2, L 1323) which became the source of national pride as it was a uniquely “Australian ballet” and it was performed at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, as part of the Commonwealth Arts Festival (R4, 1/2, L 1328-1335). Being a founding member of the Australian Ballet provided great opportunities for him.

Respondent 5’s experience of joining a professional dance company was different to the others discussed. After graduating from the ABS, no offer came from the AB, but he was offered a contract at the Queensland Ballet (QB) and was hoping to get experience there and then head overseas (1/1, L 695-697; 1/2, L 373-389). A similar scenario faced Respondent 7 upon his graduation from the ABS, only two contracts were offered then, he did not get one;
but was offered a place at PAC Ballet in South Africa which he accepted (R7, 1/2, L 35-36, 470-472). His experience there was one of a “group of professional artists in a company environment...starting off in the ranks...with timetable schedules...numerous ballets....technique classes” and opportunities to choreograph as well (R7, 1/2, L 11-21). Just before the end of his interviews with me, he was offered and accepted a position with CanDoCo, a professional dance company “for people with and without physical disabilities” in London (R7, 1/2, L 6-21).

For respondent 6, his joining a professional dance company turned out, upon much reflection; to be “the most awful experience” of his life as he had not had enough training at that stage, and that was reflected in the way he was “treated by both management and by other dancers in the company” (1/2, L 140-154).

### 4.3.4 New challenges

After beginning their career at a dance company, many dancers find themselves being offered many challenges. One respondent talks of his promotion to Principal dancer as being the culmination and pinnacle of his career and he achieved this by focussing on his technique and improving in his daily ballet class (R1, 2, L 1181-1184).

Others sought opportunities outside of the companies they were with at the time for one reason or another. One felt that his options were limited at his current company, after spending his fourth year as corps de ballet; so he auditioned for a company in Canada, was successful, and was offered a soloist contract with them (R2, 1/2, L 400-425). This move, he felt, afforded him the opportunity to extend his vocabulary as a dancer (R2, 1/2, L 650-652). Another was honest by stating he never really aspired for principal dancer status with his company but was more ambitious about choreographing with professional companies (R5, 1/2, L 914, 932-933).

Another respondent took a totally different look at the new challenges in dance. While travelling with the company, he met someone living in Europe, and wanting a relationship
with this person offered the perfect opportunity for him to leave the company and move to Europe (R3, 1, L 616-625). He had achieved soloist status and by that stage he felt it was “a good point” for him to leave the company (R3, 1, L 623-624). He did the auditioning circuit in Europe and ended up in Switzerland at the Basel Ballet (BaB) for a year, by which time his relationship had ended (R3, 1, L 628-630, 648-649).

Finally, Respondent 7’s greatest challenge was to dance again after a car accident left him wheelchair bound. A year after his accident (R7, 1/3, L 515-516), he left for New York City (NYC) to join a woman who showed him “that I could dance again, and if I wanted to dance, she could show me” (R7, 1/3, L 515-516). This was his greatest challenge, and when he got there, he had “some intense training” with her and he learned how to dance with his wheelchair, “using the wheels”, using “his upper body, using his arms as his legs, “using his wheelchair more for stability and spatial design and patterns” (R7, 1/3, L 551-567). Based on the principles he learned in NYC, he adapted them to suit himself (R7, 1/3, L 611-612), he stopped looking at himself in the mirror (R7, 1/3, L 650) and then gradually learned to stop seeing his disability and started to look at his abilities (R7, 1/3, L 705-706). By moving to NYC, he learned how to dance again.

4.3.5 Achievements

Many of those interviewed were awarded a number of different grants, scholarships and prizes during the course of their career. In 1999, one of the respondents was awarded a scholarship to study overseas for a period of two months, in Europe and the USA which he felt created a “development path … that really opened up my mind” in relation to choreographing (R3, 1/1, L 677-681; 1/2, L 1706-1707). This opportunity allowed him to see and spend time with many dance companies and choreographers like the Nederlands Dans Theater (NDT), Nacho Duarto’s Company in Spain, to attend performances at various festivals in Europe, and also see his favourite dance company, the Dutch National Ballet (DNB) (R3, 1/2, L 1724-1746).
Respondent 6, while dancing as a young man used to participate in competitions, and getting awards and prizes at these competitions helped him realise that he did have ability in dance (R5, 1/1, L 602-603). For him this was just the “icing on the cake”, and it was not what really motivated him to keep dancing (R5, 1/1, L 608-609).

A final respondent auditioned for and was accepted by both MacDonald College in Sydney and VCASS in Melbourne, but chose the latter as it was closer to his home at the time (R7, 1/1, L 941-942). He received scholarships to attend both schools (R7, 1/1, L 955). During the later part of his life, after his return to dancing from his accident; he launched his own “project dance company called Danceability” (R7, 1/3, L 946-949). He received funding for his company from the Federal Minister of the Arts at the time, and was also assisted by the Australian Ballet Company with studio space for rehearsals and for a performance (R7, 1/3, L 954-957). As there were limited opportunities in funding, he received some funding through the Foundation for Young Australians to return to NYC to continue working with the woman who started him dancing again (R7, 1/3, L 1029-1032). After his time in NYC, he went to London and attended a week long intense summer school with CanDoCo. It was here that he found his choreographic voice as they do more “contemporary classes…they’ve basically developed their own technique, which is more contemporary, modern based, but also uses…improvisation, contact improvisation, so it, its able to adapt to people’s abilities a lot better” (R7, 1/3, L 1104-1109). This was a far cry from the experiences he had in NYC this time, he was expected to be only a dancer and nothing else (R7, 1/3, L 1087-1089). He had wanted a lot more, and other influences (R7, 1/3, L 1092). It is quite clear why he chose to return to CanDoCo and is still living in London.

4.3.6 Choreographing

Only two individuals talked about getting choreographic commissions as critical. One talked about getting his first choreographic commission from the WAB in 2000, with another two to follow in 2001 and 2002 (R3, 1, L 682-684). He acknowledges that the change in
Directorship at the AB also marked a milestone for him when he choreographed his first work, what he calls his “first choreographic workshop” (R3, 1, L 657-660). He tells of the time while at dance school when he was never picked to do choreographic workshops, but stood in awe of how talented and creative the others were (R3, 2/2, L 529-531). He realised that choreography is “what being creative is….and never looked at it before that” (R3, 2/2, L 536-538). That was his start in choreography.

Respondent 6 recalls his first really big work in 1980, created for a choreographic workshop (R6, 1/2, L 882-883) which was taken into the repertoire of the AB the following year (R6, 1/2, L 886-887). He was offered a commission to do a work for the AB, a rather long work of about seventy minute duration, in collaboration with Jack Lanchbury and designer Kenneth Rowse, which opened at the Sydney Opera House in 1985 with enormous success, even garnering a standing ovation at opening night (R6, 1/2, L 967-970, L 976-978). He had also choreographed for the Australian Opera in The Merry Widow (R6, 1/2, L 936-938). He recalls his first choreographic piece with great fondness and he remembers its relationship to the stage play The Three Sisters (R6, 1/3, L 552). He had studied the play at University, loved it, seen it in performance and what was significant about it was the theme of “parting and looking to a better tomorrow” which seems to be a feature “that comes into a lot of my works” (R6, 1/3, L 553-554, L 557-559). He had thought about how good the Three Sisters would make a good ballet (R6, 1/3, L 567-568), chose the music, then the words, and went back to the music (R6, 1/3, L 587-588), and tried to get ideas across from words into dance movement (R6, 1/3, L 606-612). It ended up being “music and poetry together” and adding “a third dimension, dance” (R6, 1/3, L 624-625).

Respondent 2 was offered the opportunity to choreograph while he was still relatively quite new at the Scottish Ballet. The Director at the time was very interested in promoting young choreographers, and he was offered a chance to take on “a small commission for the company as part of their touring programme”, a piece which began at a “company workshop
programme” (R2, 1/1, L 389-393). More opportunities and more choreographic commissions came through the management of the company, which although flattering for him, was also a little disillusioning, as he felt he was being viewed more as a choreographer than as a dancer (R2, 1/1, L 394-398). He recalls another opportunity when he was asked as a young choreographer to have a work of his, alongside Jiri Kylian’s work to be part of the Edinburgh Festival. All he could think of was that he could not audition to dance for Jiri Kylian, and his career hopes as a dancer were being dashed (R2, 1/1, L 410-415).

Respondent 5 never really wanted to be a principal dancer with his company, but looked forward to the opportunity to choreograph on professional companies (R5, 1/2, L 932-933). He recalls his first choreographic piece happening while he was living in Brisbane (while at the QB). It was called Ballet Boy, and it was a student film for graduating students (R5, 1/2, L 520-521) who were required to “write a script, and direct it, as part of their final assessment” (R5, 1/2, L 523-524). He also talked of a recent opportunity to choreograph (he sees) as being related to the Artistic Director liking a piece of work he did as part of a choreographic workshop (1/2, L 979-980).

4.3.7 Artistic Directorship

Only four of the seven respondents mentioned the impact Artistic Directors or Directorship had on their careers. One respondent identified the Artistic Director at the time being responsible for nurturing him, driving him and influencing his career (R1, 2, L 1009-1010). This respondent cites the new Artistic Director of the company as being responsible for his leaving the company, as he lost any respect for him as a Director for the reason that “he couldn’t rehearse us, he couldn’t control us” (R1, 1, L 957-958). Another cites the appointment of a new Director at the ABS as being responsible for his departure from the school. It was perceived by him that “my authority and my knowledge seemed to be unsettling to her” as the cause of his dismissal from the school (R6, 1/2, L 1201-1202). He
took them to court for unfair dismissal (R6, 1/2, L 1360), but he obtained an out of court settlement from the ABS as what they “did to me was in fact illegal (R6, 1/2, L 1547-1549).

Respondent 3 felt both sides of the coin, one, by being taken under the wing of the Artistic Director and then, not being acknowledged or given attention by the replacement AD that followed after. He felt that the first Artistic Director he worked under was his biggest influence, they “fought a lot” too, but he felt that she offered him “great opportunities” with the company, and taught him “so much” (R3, 1, L 1281-1283). She was, he stated, “generous with her knowledge”, a constant figure in his career “for over 10 years”, who helped to shape him and his attitude (R3, 1, L 1288-1297). He knew that “not many people get that kind of attention”, but that was part of the reason for his leaving the company for the first time, because he needed to feel that he could “do things on his own”, and that he could use his own brain to sort out all those things himself (R3, 1, L 1311-1314). He returned to the company “a less malleable man” (R3, 1, L 1316). He went through a change of Artistic Directorship while in the company and then he found the AD did not push him the way he was used to being pushed in the past, which brought with it a realisation that his dancing career was at a plateau, sooner than he had expected, and luckily “the choreographic thing started to show itself, and one thing led to another” and he took to choreographing instead as a career move (R3, 1, L 661-672). So he found his new direction and was offered a scholarship to help him with this move (R3, 1, L 677-678).

Respondent 4 was present at the establishment of the first permanent national dance company in Australia (AB) after the demise of the Borovansky Ballet (BB) (1/2, L 973-974, L 1247). Mr Borovansky’s replacement as AD of BB was also to become the newly appointed AD of the AB.

He was accepted as a Soloist into the new company based on his past experience with the BB, and also on the basis of a re-audition with the new AD of the newly established AB (R4, 1/2, L 1173). He felt that his greatest support was not from the AD’s directly, but rather
from other people in the management of the company, like the Ballet Master (R4, 2/2, L 615). He identifies the AD of the company as being responsible for giving him the greatest dance opportunity of his life (R4, 2/3, L 32-35). It offered him the opportunity to dance the role of the Lyrebird (R4, 2/3, L 32), work with “a great star of the world theatre” Sir Robert Helpmann (R4, 2/3, L 216) and to be a part of the first Australian Ballet Company (R4, 2/3, L 515).

4.3.8 Dance related injury

Only one person mentions a dance related injury as being critical. He talks of having Achilles tendon problems since “school days”, but had to finally undergo an operation on his Achilles tendon in mid 1987 (R1, 3, L 9-21). His rehabilitation programme involved “learning to walk on crutches, learning to walk with a stick, to learning to walk without one” (R1, 3, L 23-25). But it was this injury that made him “more aware of his body and its limitation” and he started to take yoga classes (R1, 3, L 25-27).

He was at that stage planning to move and join a new ballet company (R1, 3, L 39 - 40). He did move there in early 1988, and after his first season there, during one of his *pas de deux* classes he learned more about his physicality, or rather the lack of physicality, which started him “going to the gym” to “increase his upper body strength” (R1, 3, L 59-60). This was a direct result of his doing yoga classes and being more aware of his body (R1, 3, L 58-59). This injury also helped him to re-learn his technique, a factor he credits as being responsible for his promotion to principal dancer at his company (R1, 3, L 62-64). This illustrates a very simple case of a weakness being turned into an opportunity.

4.3.9 New opportunities

In this section, I will focus on only two respondents. One moved away from dancing to go into teaching dance. The other started off as a dancer, tried choreography, returned to
dancing, and then followed that up with positions as Artistic Directors of various dance companies.

Respondent 6 began his teaching career in Western Australia, after an unsuccessful attempt at being a dancer with WAB, which only lasted for six months (R6, 1/2, L 341-348). In the meantime, he had met his partner, so he decided to stay in Perth, and started to teach at the company (R6, 1/2, L 356-359). After two years in Perth, he got a fellowship to go to NYC to study contemporary dance, and it was while he was in NYC that he was advised of an immediate vacancy for him on the staff at ABS (R6, 1/2, L 538). He felt the offer of a job was good timing as it was time for him to get out of NYC because of the AIDS epidemic and “all of my friends have since died” (R6, 1/2, L 544-546). He recollects on his time at the ABS, when he was a student there in 1968, and was now returning as a contemporary teacher (R6, 1/2, L 723-728). By 1985, he had crossed over to teaching classical technique, and the influence of the Russian training in Classical dance was of great interest to him, which was further enhanced by his forming a very good relationship with a visiting Russian Professor at the AB (R6, 1/2, L 1084-1087).

This was followed by his dismissal from ABS by the new principal of the school, and in 1994, he started teaching part time at the VCA (R6, 1/2, L 1271). He was offered a full time contract at the VCA in 1998 (R6, 1/2, L 1436-1437). He felt the VCA was more professionally run and more academic especially because of its links with The University of Melbourne (R6, 1/2, L 1530-1532). The VCA placed an emphasis on choreography which gave some opportunity to create quite a few works there (R6, 1/2, 1558-1560), which made him feel “at home” and thought “it was right” for him too (R6, 1/2, L 442-443). He never really felt right, as he grew up in the 1950s, and felt he had to try and fit into the sporty male stereotype (R6, 1/2, L 444-450), but in the 1990s, he felt quite himself as a dance teacher.

Respondent 2’s experiences were quite different to previous respondents. His first appointment as an administrator was an Acting Artistic Director position at the HKBC, a
position that was offered to him after being noticed when he spent some time in Hong Kong (HK) as choreographer for the Hong Kong Ballet Group (HKBG). Just before he accepted the position in HK, he had been successful in auditioning for the professional dancers teaching course at the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD), a course specifically designed to assist dancers making the transition to becoming teachers (R2, 2, L 169-172). He stayed with the course for only a term, as he was invited to assume the position of Artistic Director after only eight months in his position as Acting Artistic Director of the HKBC (R2, 2, L 184-190).

Although his time in HK was enjoyable, he realised that all was going to change with HK reverting back to China, and more importantly the incident at Tiananmen Square made him question his future in HK (R2, 2, L 258-263). At about the same time, a position became available in South Africa with the NAPAC Dance Company (NDC), which he accepted (R2, 2, L 263-268). The political turmoil that ensued during his period there caused him again to rethink his options (R2, 2, L 310-312), so he returned to live in London and pursue a Masters in Dance degree (R2, 2, L 335). His return to the United Kingdom created more problems for him as it did not allow him to continue his relationship with a male partner from the Philippines, who was not allowed entry into the UK on the grounds of a de-facto relationship (R2, 2, L 494-496). He finally took a position heading up the contemporary dance programme at a local polytechnic in New Zealand as he was able to bring his partner along with him to live in New Zealand (R2, 2, L 548-552). There he stayed to this day. The discussion above is similar to that presented in Section 4.2.5, where I discussed socio-political changes. It was the socio-political climate which created the scenarios resulting in this respondent’s seeking new opportunities in New Zealand.

4.3.10 Retiring from dance

Only two people talked of their retiring from dance as being critical. Respondent 1 cites a lack of respect for the new AD as the reason for his leaving dancing altogether (R1, 2, L 958). His decision to retire was not made lightly. He had seen five out of seven Principal
dancers retire during the time of the new AD (R1, 2, L 959). He chose to resign after a period of depression (R1, 2, L 965) as his attempt to cross over into management as Ballet Master was taken away from him (R1, 2, L 1151-1152) and he would rather retire from dance than go back to Europe (R1, 2, L 1004). He retired from dance and chose an entirely different vocation.

Respondent 4 on the other hand chose to retire for a number of salient reasons. The chief of which was that he had been dancing “non-stop” for 15 years, his “body was losing its flexibility, and its elasticity” and he also knew his body was telling him “its time” to retire (R1, 2, L 1371-1376). The AD at the time was fair with him and allowed to retire on the understanding that he would be available for the character roles he did (R4, 2, L 1378-1384). After all those years of travelling and touring, he chose to retire so he could “settle down, have my own home and my own life” (R1, 2, L 1392-1393).

4.3.11 Choosing to dance again

Respondent 7 had a unique challenge in his life. He became a quadriplegic after a car accident, but his passion to dance never dulled or dissipated, instead he chose to dance again as a differently abled person and dancer.

While he was undergoing rehabilitation in Australia, he “spent a lot of time thinking” about family, friends, a new career, and his perceptions of dance in relation to his standing up (R7, 1/2, L 54–553). It took him a long time to get to the stage where he could see himself dancing, maybe using his chair (R7, 1/2, L 556-557) but in the meantime, his passion to dance did not stop, as he was a physical person who loved to move (R7, 1/2, L 559-562). Thoughts of giving up were always present, but he wanted the death of his friends in the same accident as his to be worth something, so he kept his inner strength and that forced him to keep going (R7, 1/2, L 575-576). His friends introduced him to a woman in NYC (Kitty Lund) who danced in her chair, and that changed his whole perception of dance and with that he “wanted to change the rest of the world’s perceptions too” (R7, 1/2, L 591-624). He now had an
ambition to achieve, to expand his own abilities artistically and creatively, and to challenge the audience and general publics’ “perception of dance and disability” (R7, 1/2, L 104-110). In this process of learning, he learned an important thing about himself, that his urge to dance was quite separate and distinct from his need to choreograph (R7, 1/3, L 21-24). He recalls that his wanting to dance again involved him having to “start experiencing life again” to have interests and that was “extremely hard” for him (R7, 1/3, L 419-427).

His meeting with Kitty Lund showed him the way to dance again (R7, 1/3, L 507-508) and to change his perception about himself, to stop seeing his disability but rather to look at his abilities (R7, 1/3, L 705-706). He started performing and choreographing again and even had his own project dance company ‘Danceability’ (R7, 3, L 946-949). His summer school experience with CanDoCo in London helped him to develop his own style, much better than what he learned at Kitty Lund’s company in NYC (R7, 1/3, L 1160-1172). He does not “stew over” the fact that he is not “a perfect being” but looks ahead as being a choreographer for both the able and disabled, having learned a whole new dance vocabulary; but also to focus more on not what can be done, but rather on what “doesn’t have to be done” (R7, 2/2, L 810-817). With this, I conclude this chapter.

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

I have looked specifically at the critical incidents that affected the respondents both personally and professionally. Not all of the incidents were separate and distinct. Some crossed over from the personal to having an impact professionally. This is to be expected as life changing and life altering incidents have both a deeply profound and personal component and consequently for some, an additional effect on their lives professionally.
CHAPTER 5 RESULTS – PROBLEMS, SKILLS AND DECISIONS

In chapter four, I looked at the results from the analysis of the critical incidents identified by the respondents interviewed in the research study, which addressed the primary research question posed in Chapter One. In this chapter, I will be addressing the results of the analysis of the secondary research questions. The secondary research questions identified in Chapter One are as follows:

1. What are the problems (personal and professional) these male dancers and/or choreographers faced while in pursuit of their individual careers?

2. What are the skills they possessed, and/or acquired, to assist them in the resolution of these problems (as in 1 above), to help them arrive at decision(s) to undertake and implement?

3. What are the decisions they made, as a direct consequence of their experiences with the critical incidents, in the way they lived their lives as dancers and/or choreographers?

It is pertinent at this point to highlight and address a number of issues relating to these research questions. To begin with, the critical incidents identified as being life altering, life changing and offering a different perspective on life, have for many of the respondents also been stumbling blocks they have had to overcome. There will be some degree of intersection and overlap in the discussions of the problems and critical incidents. Furthermore, problems will lead to or result in decisions being made to solve and/or overcome them. In doing so, many of the respondents would rely on their skills, both inherent and acquired to solve these problems. It is inevitable that there will be considerable overlap in the discussions to follow. There is significant crossover, overlapping and intersecting of the problems, skills and decisions made resulting in some major repetition of material considered in this chapter. It is not always possible to cover significant in depth discussions of issues under one single heading, as some issues lend themselves to multiple perceptions, analyses and points of view.
For example, in the previous chapter, the issue of a dancer’s consequent physical disability (of a personal nature) results in the dancer choosing to dance again as a differently abled dancer (a professional choice). In yet another example, many respondents highlighted dancing professionally and choreographing posed distinct problems of their own for many of them, which will be addressed again as the skills they learned, used and honed to dance and choreograph. These issues may be further highlighted and elaborated when many discuss their decision(s) to choreograph rather than just dance professionally as a means of adding new skills to their repertoire.

In terms of the problems the respondents faced in the course of their lives and career, I adopted a classification of personal and professional. Of those which were of a personal nature, I adopted a classification of emotional and familial, physical, psycho-sexual, and socio-political.

In terms of the skills used and/or obtained, I analysed them under two distinct categories, those that are innate to an individual(s) and/or genetically inherited, and those that are acquired through training, career and life experiences. I also chose to present the results on the problems and skills, one following the other, as I consider them to be intrinsically linked. The problems they faced were resolved by the skills they had and/or acquired through their personal and professional lives.

Finally, in terms of the types of decisions they made during their career, I identified a typology of decisions that were time and profession related, namely the decisions made: prior to their attending dance school, while they were training in dance, while they were dancing with professional companies, and the related decisions: why they chose to dance and/or choreograph, when they chose to refocus their dancing careers, and finally, when they chose to retire from dance and dancing.
5.1 PROBLEMS – PERSONAL

I begin this section by identifying and discussing the problems that were classified as being of a personal nature. These problems ranged from those that were emotionally charged and a large number which arose from issues relating to the family, followed by those relating to their physique, the socio-political issues of the time, and the psycho-sexual issues that came to bear upon them as they assumed their adult identity.

5.1.1 Personal – emotional and familial

The problems raised by the respondents in this section were intrinsically of an emotional nature. The personal nature of these problems was related closely to family and was therefore emotionally charged. Two distinct groups emerged, problems as a result of the nature of the family itself (its constituents, structure and beliefs and values) while the other related to the way the respondents interacted and responded to the influences and influencers of the family.

5.1.1.1 Family religion

Only two respondents identified religion as having a significant impact on their lives. This issue was raised in terms of their critical incidents as well. Respondent 1 identified closely with Roman Catholicism, who sang in Church choirs as a child and as an adult, and who also celebrated Christmas (R1, L 235-238). He also remembers being quite “devout” praying to get into the RBS, and saying “decades of the rosary” so that he would not be gay (1, 3, L 601-603, 645). The other respondent converted to Roman Catholicism because he was in love with a man who was Roman Catholic (R2, 1, L 91-92). This conversion, he felt, would bring him greater fulfilment and assist him with his relationship, but in the end, did neither (R2, 1, L 93-94). Also, later in life, he found the Roman Catholic Church’s indifference to the AIDS epidemic “appalled” him (R2, 1, L 95-96).
5.1.1.2 Schooling experience

Respondent 1 attended a “Catholic Priest School” (Secondary) and it was a priest who was in charge of career guidance classes, and who interpreted his wanting a dance career as a “waste of time” (1, L 248-255). In between times before ballet classes and after school, he used to “pop in to St Augustine’s Church, next to the library, and pray” (1, L 276-278). His life during that time revolved around studying in the library and praying at the Church (R1, 1, L 273-275). Respondent 3, on the other hand, got teased terribly at school because of his pursuit of dance as a career, this upset him “but it never occurred to him to stop” dancing at all (1, L 1398-1403). He got beaten up once, but he never wanted to just stop doing dance, and he cites being mentally tough for as the reason refusing to bow to the pressure of his peers (R3, 1, L 1414-1416).

5.1.1.3 Family background

Four out of seven respondents cited family background as an issue with which they had to contend. Respondent 1 did not feel that his family background played any part or influence in his career. Respondent 2 explained that he was “born into a theatrical family” and his uncle was one of the “war time comedians” (1, L 9-12). He also cites his home environment as one that “typifies the notion of the homosexual upbringing” with an “over protective mother and an absent father” (R2, 2/2, L 48-50).

The next respondent suffered the loss of both parents while in his youth and this had a strong impact on him. His father was “killed in car accident” while he was still a student at the ABS, and ironically it was at this stage he felt that his father was beginning to come to terms with his becoming a dancer and he felt that his father “was very proud of me” (R3, 1, L 469-481). His relationship with his father before then was not a good one, “it was not volatile it was absent” (R3, 1, L 1585-1586). He had little connection with his father, and he felt that until his father saw the success he was making with his life, “he could not make the connection mentally” (R3, 1, L 1591-1593). His father did manage to get a glimpse of his
ability during one of the summer schools back in New Zealand, and that was “a turning point” for his father (R3, 1, L 1595-1598).

Five years after the death of his father, his mother committed suicide, and that left him with “lots of feelings” and having “to survive the emotional aftermath of something like that” (R3, 1, L 590-602). He felt tremendous guilt over the death of his mother, as he believed that if she was not living in Australia with him “it would not have happened” (R3, 1, L 1604-1606). His mother also had problems with his coming out to her as a gay man, she chose to speak to his brother about it, which made him angry, as he wanted to be the first one to inform his brother of his sexual identity (R3, 1/2, L 235-241). He remembers his childhood as being idyllic and very busy, by choice (R3, 2/1, L 480-488), but never felt he had “to fulfil his parents desires” in any way (R3, 2/1, L 501-503). But, as he grew into an adult he established a better relationship with his other siblings, a sister and a brother (R3, 2/1, L 513-518).

Respondent 6 always knew his choice of a career “was disappointing” to his father, who was hoping he would have “an academic career” (R6, 1/1, L 40-41), and his “father was especially” unhappy with his doing dance classes. His mother was neither negative nor supportive of him in this choice (R6, 1/1, L 40-41), and rationalises that “parents do not necessarily push their male sons towards the theatre” (R6, 1/1, L 40-41). He also stated his father had a very violent temper and he was very frightened of him, and he did not get on with his father until his mid teen years (R6, 2/1, L 868-873). His mother, on the other hand, was “very loving and devoted”, but “could never bear for him” to be out of the country, would even attempt “to blackmail” him to return to Australia, as she was very anxious and “imagined the worst things would happen” while he was away (R6, 2/1, L 1116-1133).

Respondent 7 was born in a small town in a rural farming community, and was the only child of a single mother (R7, 1/1, L 101-123). He was accepting of this fact and stated that although he missed having a father figure, he did “gain a lot of other things” (R7, 1/1,
He did realise he was not raised “in a traditional family environment”, he did not have a father figure and therefore did not get the opportunity to do “son and father things” as a result (R7, 1/1, L 764-767). Growing up in a small town was “isolating” for him (R7, 1/1, L 861), with limited access to the best education, the best dance training, and also having limited financial resources available (R7, 1/1, L 861-895).

He never felt any resentment whatsoever for the decision his mother made to have her child alone, he reconciled it with the fact that it was a decision that she made to bring him up on her own (R7, 2/1, L 720-724). This respondent never met his father until the age of fourteen (R7, 2/1, L 764-765). He managed to obtain an address of where his father was (from his father’s parents) and began by writing letters to him in Darwin, where he lived (R7, 2/1, L 798-802). He finally met his father on the one occasion when his father “happened one time to pass through Melbourne” (R7, 2/1, L 804-807). His meeting with his father was not what he had hoped for, he wanted a father in his life, and he used to “dream about times of going and spending time with him in Darwin”, but his father “obviously couldn’t cope” (R7, 2/1, L 841-851). His father sent him flowers after his accident in South Africa, “he used to call, he called a couple of times” but has never come back to see him since (R7, 2/1, L 857-866).

He found substitute fathers in his mother’s brothers and was close to them; it was with them that he found his father figure and role models (R7, 2/1, L 883-903). This situation was further exacerbated when his mother tried to see other men, as he would tell them he hated them and ask them to get out of the house, as he felt they were usurping his place as the “man of the house” (R7, 2/1, L 920-935). His mother is now settled into a fifteen year relationship, as she is adamant she does not want to marry or be married (R7, 2/1, L 958-966), with a man he states is an alcoholic; but they have two children together, and he feels protective of his mother, his brother and his sister (R7, 2/1, L 1011-1019). He feels his mother can do better
with her choice of husband (R7, 2/1, L 1003-1004), but that aside, he feels a responsibility to educate his brother about the world (R7, 2/1, L 1032-1034).

5.1.1.4 Feeling isolated and apart

All but one respondent felt isolated from the family or a sense of being apart during the course of their dancing career. Only Respondent 5 did not identify this as being an issue. Respondent 1, as he advanced in his dancing career, no longer felt isolated except from his family, and this made him feel isolated from his Irish roots (2, L 1414-1421).

Respondent 2 felt isolated and excluded, particularly in school. He communicated better with the girls, he was not good at sports, friends never chose him for their teams, and he was also never encouraged to be into physical activity (R2, 1, L 56-58). He knew he could excel in individual pursuits like track and field, never tried to draw attention to himself, and was subject to ridicule in the showers and changing rooms (R2, 1, L 58-60). He learned the power of sexual stigma early on (R2, 1, L 60-61), so he was in fact very much a loner from his school days.

Respondent 3, in being admitted to VCA in Melbourne, was aware that the family was moving apart as his mother was accompanying him, while the rest of the family remained in New Zealand (1, L 1455-1456). He felt a sense of responsibility, he wanted his parents to stay together and to come on his own, but it was his parent’s decision ultimately (R3, 1, L 1462-1464). He also felt that his decision to pursue dance did not allow him the opportunity to gain a connection with his father like his brother did, as they shared “a connection through sport” (R3, 1, L 1588-1589).

Another respondent despite missing his family while away on tour wrote home frequently. But, he constantly had to learn new choreography for all the ballets, and that kept him fairly well occupied (R4, 1/2, L 765-767). Yet another respondent expressed his apartness from his family as being a positive move for him. He did not have a “particularly happy time when I lived with my family...I think it’s only when I was free of living with my
family could I be who I really was, and I think in that way...I was happier, much happier” (R6, 2/2, L 433-436).

Respondent 7 left home much earlier in life, at around twelve years of age to attend the VCASS (1/1, L 939-942), and this had a huge impact on him as he had “spent the last eleven years of my life...she (his mother) was protection, love and support” (R7, 1/1, L 925-927). Being a boarder at VCASS in this “big mansion in Armadale...totally on my own...in a totally new world...basically threw my world upside down” (R7, 1/2, L 644-651), and was extremely hard emotionally (R7, 1/2, L 640). He was at first very scared, frightened, unhappy and miserable, but this gave him the opportunity to mature and grow (R7, 1/2, L 668-687). Finally, after his accident in South Africa, as he returned to dance as a differently abled person, he did “feel a little segregated from the rest of the dance community” in which he was part of to begin with and he also felt his loss of friends accentuated this sense of being “separated from the dance world” (R7, 2/2, L 88-101). He attributed this to the fact that “people see what they want to see” in relation to his being a differently abled dancer dancing with his wheelchair (R7, 2/2, L 170).

The multitude of issues relating to Respondent 7’s accident, and subsequent recovery, to become a differently abled dancer, will feature in a number of sections to follow. Although they appear to be repetitious, they are important as they intersect, overlap, and cover a wide range of different issues and topics considered in this research. This next set of problems relate specifically to emotional feelings which were experienced by the respondents, and to their emotional states of mind.

5.1.1.5 Feeling embarrassed and different

Only two respondents highlighted their dancing as being a source of embarrassment for them personally. One respondent recalls his first dance class as causing him a certain degree of nervousness and embarrassment and this was coupled with the fact that he was the only other boy at this class (R4, 1/1, L 398-399, 417). His main cause for embarrassment was
the fact that “he didn’t really know” what he was “going to have to do next” during the class, and this sense of strangeness was exacerbated by his having to wear “a jock strap and tights on and ballet shoes and a shirt” which also made him feel terribly intimidated at the same time (R4, 1/1, L 402-405).

Respondent 5 felt he had to hide the fact he was a dancer while he was at school (R5, 1/1, L 84-85). The school he attended was a Catholic Co-Educational School in what he considered to be “quite a rough area” with lots of people living in housing commission flats, but “it was equivalent to a private school” with the downside of being “rural” (R5, 1/1, L 102-108). In addition, the pursuit of dance during his childhood meant he was given special attention and privileges became an issue with the rest of his siblings, and affected his relationship with them at the time (R5, 1/1, L 591-594). Pursuing dance as a career, in addition to being embarrassing, was not rewarding or satisfying financially for this respondent, and this lack of being able to do anything about it caused him some degree of frustration (R5, 1/1, L 318-334).

5.1.1.6 Reliance on someone else (external)

Respondent 1 recalls having to obtain a signature and permission from his Teacher and Principal from his dance school in Ireland in order for him to audition with the Royal Ballet School (R1, 3, L 303-305). He approached his teacher for her signature and she flatly refused to sign the form for him (R1, 3, L 306-309). In the end he had to rely on the influence and connections of a male dancer to arrange the waiver of a signature to allow him to audition for the Royal Ballet School, which he did in the end, and managed to gain entry there (R1, 3, L 320-329).

Respondent 2, on the other hand makes reference to his time as corps de ballet with the Scottish Ballet, when he felt his ability was not the prime determinant in getting cast for roles. In fact, what was “very distressing for him” was that despite being told he was progressing well within the company in terms of their appraisals for contract renewals, he was
not getting cast for roles (R2, 1, L 507-515). This was not what he had expected after his training at the RBS, where they had instilled in him the belief that he was better trained and hence would have the expectation that he would get the roles for which he aspired (R2, 1, L 538-540). This fact made him realise that casting assignments were made based not solely on his ability, and hence, his control, but rather under the control of the Management and Director of the company (R2, 1, L 518-526). This had the effect of undermining him both professionally and personally (R2, 1, L 515-517).

5.1.1.7 The love for dance

Only two out of seven respondents cited their love of dance and for dance as a source of contention. Respondent 2, while growing up used to perform regularly with his cousin at summer holidays, and he saw this purely as a natural expression of growing, experiencing the physical exhilaration of dance, and moving without limits (R2, 1, L 41-43). This mental image of dance changed after the summer holiday, when he was subject to name calling “poofter” and “pansy” which meant he started losing friends and as a result began feeling ashamed of his dancing (R2, 1, L 44-47). This social stigma resulted in his being excluded by and from his friends and classmates (R2, 1, L 47-48).

Respondent 6 remembers being different from the other members of his family and still does (2/1, L 1030-1034). He attributes this to the fact that he “didn’t like the things that they liked...like sport...I was very different” (R6, 2/1, L 1030-1034). “I was more intellectual than my siblings”, and as a result, he still finds it difficult to “go back there” to visit with the family (R6, 2/1, L 1030-1034). This respondent laments about the other areas he could have developed but did not as he chose to dance and to teach dance – he could have done social work and he also gave up composing music too, a love he had which was stronger than his love for dance (R6, 2/2, L 505-518). He even states music “might have been a better thing for me to have done” (R6, 2/2, L 519).
5.1.1.8 Following their heart

Three respondents mentioned that in their pursuit of a dance career they made decisions that were dictated by their heart. Respondent 1 remembers moving to New Zealand because he had fallen in love with someone living there, and he moved there despite knowing that it was a “bad thing to follow him” but he was so “besotted and in love that just being in the same hemisphere was going to be , you know, better” (3, L 874-876). Respondent 3 on the other hand was having a relationship with someone from Europe, but he did not just rush off to chase this person. Instead, he had already been promoted to soloist by this stage, and felt that he “was at a good point...to leave the company” because he had “a certain amount of experience” and was “still young enough” to take the time off from the company (1, L 617-625). When his relationship in Europe ended, he decided to return to Australia, which was most fortuitous as he met someone after his return and they are in a relationship at the time of the interview (R3, 1, L 648-652).

Respondent 5 states that dancing as a vocation “a lot of the time” allows him to be fulfilled, there are times when he feels “kinda unsure” but “for the most part” he feels self fulfilled as a dancer (R5, 2/2, L 942-943) and as a choreographer he states “that I’m pretty happy with most I’ve done” (R5, 2/2, L 973).

5.1.1.9 Self-esteem

Only three respondents spoke of the relationship between dance and/or dancing and its impact on their self-esteem. One respondent talks of attaining a position as Principal dancer with a royal dance company definitely helped his self-esteem (R1, 2, L 1382-1384). Another tells of the constant appraisals he was subjected to by the company, and the frequent loss of roles by not being cast by the company Director, undermined his self-esteem both professionally and personally (R2, 1/1, L 516-517). Finally, one respondent stated that he had “low self-esteem as a dancer” because he had “skinny legs” and did not have the “ideal classical look” for a ballet dancer (R6, 1/1, L 858-860). He also tells of how intimidated he
was by his teacher at his first ballet class, that he was frightened to even go back to these classes (R6, 1/2, L 26-27). This respondent also cites the fact that his first year at any place, be it at dance school or in a teaching position was a “particularly difficult time” for him, as he felt that he was not accepted by the students but the feeling passes with the passage of time (R6, 1/2, L 787-794)

5.1.2 Problems – Physical and Physique

One of the key criteria for the selection of all male dancers is their physique and physicality. They are assessed, for example, by their turnout, their legs, the point of their feet and also their training. Their physique will always be an important issue and a concern.

All but two respondents raised this as an issue. Respondent 1 had a lot to say about the issue of his physique and physicality. He felt that he had a good body to begin with which helped lead him in the right direction – his legs were “fairly straight” and his feet pointed in the right direction and he was “fairly well proportioned”, but the hindrance lay in the fact that he had big calves, which for executing “small quick steps” was ideal, but when it came to doing big jumps his “thighs weren’t big enough” (R1, 1, L 195-204). In being critical about himself, he stated that he saw “his calves as being wider than his hips” and that he felt was “pretty strange” (R1, 1, L 207-208). His arms were also very weak, with a weak upper body and a “slight curvature between the shoulder inwards...or forwards, which made partnering sort of dangerous” (R1, 1, L 209-211). He even added that his turnout was just “so so” and he was “never really very flexible” but it was “good enough to get into the RBS” (R1, 1, L 220-223).

Respondent 3 was obviously aware and critical of his own physique. He tore a tendon while cycling, and as part of his rehabilitation started attending yoga classes. While he learned how to walk again, he became more aware of his body and its limitations, resulting in his being more knowledgeable of how his body really works (R1, 3, L 25-37). This respondent felt that he was “on the thin side” physically, and when he started dance training at
fourteen he had “no upper body strength at all” compared to the other boys at the school who were at least seventeen years of age (R3, 2/2, L 206-214). The fact that he was younger while at dance school also meant that it “took a while to catch up and stuff” and it did take a while (R3, 2/2, L 659-660). He struggled to do partnering classes at school, as he was always fearful that he might hurt his back, and that was “something that had gone wrong for my mum” (R3, 2/2, L 216-223). He had to always go to the gym and try to fit that in with full time schooling (dance) and, studying by correspondence, which was tough for him both mentally and physically (R3, 2/2, L 226-232).

Respondent 4 talks of coping with the physical demands of dance easily, through the rigours of the daily dance class where he worked so hard so the requirements for stamina were something you built up quite easily (R4, 1/2, L 878-883). He stated that he had to be “as good as everybody else” as even the principals hardly ever had a night off, and this was achieved with very few injuries too (R4, 1/2, L 885-896).

Respondent 5 discussed having asthma as a child and was advised to take up swimming to build up his lung capacity (1/2, L 78-81). In addition, as he was raised in a coastal city and lived close to the beach, he was swimming at the beach all of the time (R5, 1/2, L 84-85). When he got older and attending dance school, he found that “strength and stuff was not a big issue” as he used “to do gym work and a little bit of Pilates as well” (R5, 1/2, L 313-315). When he went to the gym (at the time of the interview) it was “mainly just to do some cardio...like on the bike” (R5, 1/2, L 319-320). When this respondent moved from the QB to the AB, he found the demands on his time for learning the repertoire and having more rehearsals was much stronger and heavier than before; which left him little time for anything else outside of dance (R5, 1/2, L 608-619, 657-660).

Respondent 7 had an entirely different issue with his body. Prior to his accident he perceived himself “physically as a dancer” who was “standing up” on both feet (R7, 1/2,
But that ideal of who he was, was lost when he had his accident, he had to contend with “having a disability” after a “spinal cord injury” and that changed the way he perceived himself “physically and sexually” (R7, 1/2, L 382-383, 387-388). He reiterated that “he would give it up in a second, to be able to walk again” (R7, 1/2, L 369-370) because he knows “what it’s like to walk” and “what it’s like to have a disability” (R7, 1/2, L 369-376). After he viewed someone dance in and with her wheelchair in NYC, his whole perception of dance changed, and he “wanted to change the rest of the worlds perceptions” about dance too (R7, 1/2, L 622-624).

5.1.3 Problems – Socio-Political

This problem is identified as being socio-political because these respondents felt they had to fight social bias/norms and in some instances prejudice to pursue a career in dance. All but one respondent identified with this problem. “I knew the people who were prejudiced were ignorant” and “I was always proud of what I did” and he tries to see things from their perspective – “I look at their background and I think how else would they think?” (R1, 2, L 1838-1844) and this was the response I got from him to a question about having to rise above social bias.

Respondent 2 recalls how appalled he felt by the Christian religions’ indifference to the AIDS epidemic especially since he converted to the religion to please his partner at the time (1, L 91-97). This respondent also identified as being “discriminated against as a same sex relationship, having not been perceived by the British Government to have the same value in terms of immigration as a heterosexual relationship” (R2, 1, L 609-611) as he was trying to get his partner a visa to return with him to live in the United Kingdom. This level of intolerance appalled him and states that “the level of fascism that we faced in terms...of the whole rise of the moral right, and the whole approach of Thatcherism...we were considered as a non-entity” (R2, 1, L 652-655).
Respondent 4 saw his choice of being a dancer as being against what was the social norm for him at the time, given his family background, but his take on his decision was the fact that yes, it was outside the confines of society at the time, it was his decision and he just could not fight “that inner desire in him” and “you can’t prevent it” (2/1, L 77-84).

Respondent 5 agreed that choosing to be a dancer was against social norms, but for him that was not a strange choice at all because “it was always kind of going to happen” (1/3, L 1249-1253, L 1273-1274).

Respondent 6 said that in Europe for men to dance “was quite a natural thing to do” especially “if you look at your folk dancing” but it is the conditioning of our (Australian) culture that makes people view dancing as feminine (2/1, L 415-418). It is not surprising therefore for him to state that dance was against social norms, and that it was seen as rather “airy fairy and the theatre” too (R6, 2/1, L 441-443). He also felt that he had to rise against social bias especially when he was younger and as a teenager and it was “a bit embarrassing actually, to even talk about it” (R6, 2/1, L 542-548).

Respondent 7 has an entirely different take on the issue. For him, pursuing dance was not normal because he did not feel normal in relation to wanting a more traditional career path, he found his “direction through dance, which felt normal” for him (R7, 2/1, L 435-440). He adds further that being disabled was very much against “the perfection of being a perfect human being...what we in society see it as, as being on two legs...having a great physique...and being intelligent” (R7, 2/2, L 775-778). His wanting to dance and choreograph as a disabled or differently abled person, involved him having to broaden his own perception about movement and choreography (R7, 2/2, L 857-859) and in doing so, will broaden the viewing audiences’ perception of dance. He continues to dance and choreograph because he believes that there will always “be something he wants to work on” (R7, 2/2, L 974).
5.1.4 Problems – Psycho-sexual

These next set of issues relate specifically to the respondents individual psychological well being and the effect their sexual orientation had on their lives and careers. These issues are many and equally as varied, but will be treated here under one category rather than as separate sub headings.

Two respondents found that they had to keep their personal life separate from their professional life. Respondent 4 felt company life was like being in a family; he kept his romantic life separate from the company and as such would “never have any relationships with anybody in the company” (1/1, L 616-617, 647). Respondent 6 on the other hand, has become a teacher and mentor to many young students of dance, states that the gaining of a gay identity for many can be isolating and what he calls “lonely making” (2/1, L 923, 957, 960). This is because these young teenagers have great difficulty dealing with the prejudice, with no visible source of support to go to, especially when you know “there’s a great chunk of you that you just can’t reveal” (R6, 2/1, L 963-970). He cited his inability to talk to anyone in his family about his first romance, and hence received no sympathy from anyone when the romance failed (R6, 2/1, L 970-973). He understands quite well why some young gay teenagers resort to suicide (R6, 2/1, L 933-934).

After the acquiring of a sexual orientation and/or identity, many find the next step in their development is to come out as gay men. This coming out (gay self-identification) process can be difficult for many. Respondent 1 is categorical that being in dance did not influence his coming out process. Respondent 2 states being a dancer had “a very strong influence” on his “coming out and being accepted” and his choice of “lifestyle and sexual orientation” (L 1595-1597). He even states that for men “you were almost gay until proven straight” and it was a “very, very safe environment to be in if you’re gay” as you are accepted by your bosses, your peers and “even to a certain extent by the public” (R1, 2, L 1600-1604). He was also fortunate that when he started with a professional company there were good role
models of being gay, and this support led him to choose a boyfriend from within the company (R1, 2, L 1625-1626, 1644-1645). He had another relationship with a visiting dancer to this company, from him he learned a lot, as if he was a life coach who thought him about the kind of relationship he wanted in life, and it certainly was not with someone “who was never comfortable with his own sexuality” who was not “comfortable about it or with it”, and who could not express his true feelings (R1, 2, L 1671-1674, 1695-1699). He adds further, while he was in London at the RBS, he spent some time playing at being straight and having girlfriends, even though being gay did not affect in any way anyone’s chances of getting into the Company or their dancing career (R1, 3, L 979-986). He cites his lack of maturity as the reason for this behaviour (R1, 3, L 994-995).

Respondent 5 joined QB after graduation from ABS. He felt that “he was the only gay guy joining there” (QB) as Brisbane is a different city to Melbourne (2/1, L 750-754). He found that he had to acquire a social network there, but the gay community in Brisbane was smaller than that is Melbourne, meant that choices were limited and different (2/1, L 760-764).

Respondent 6 found that being gay was going to be hard for him to accept. “As a good Catholic boy” he fought it for some years, and felt “great regret” that how would not have or lead a normal life, and even felt that in some way he “had a deformity” (R6, 1/3, L 1175-1187). His first homosexual encounter at a party “devastated” him, and he left the party in “absolute tears” crying and “praying to god not to make the theatre the devil” (R6, 1/3, L 1213-1216). This all happened despite the fact that he remembers “as a toddler being fascinated by naked men in the showers...in the swimming baths” (R6, 1/3, L 1345–1347). He is more accepting now and is a “great believer that...it is part of you...it is born in you” (R6, 1/3, L 1356-1357).

Following on from an earlier statement made by Respondent 1, the world of ballet is supportive of gay men (R1, 2, L 1600-1604), it was accepting and made the environment safe
(R1, 3, L 1019-1021, 1035-1036), and did not, in fact, make him gay at all (R1, 2, L 1595-1597). Two other respondents expressed similar sentiments about the dance world. Respondent 5 says he grew up in a tolerant community, but even after he moved to Brisbane, he managed to find a great group of friends who were accepting (R5, 1/3, L 1360-1417). He states that what makes it easier is one’s personality traits and he cites “a good sense of humour, being able to laugh at others, and being very accommodating” as traits worth having (R5, 1/3, L 1431-1442). Respondent 6 identifies that his move into the world of dance was enhanced by the fact that many of his friends were dancers and so they were all in it together (R6, 2/1, L 607-609) which made the fight against social prejudice less daunting (R6, 2/1, L 614-618).

It is inevitable, for any man identifying as being gay, to be branded as less than a man or not being masculine enough, and hence by definition; as being feminine. All but one respondent takes this issue up in their interviews.

Respondent 1 recalls the Artistic Director of the company he was with citing (by implication) that his lack of promotion was because he was “gay or because you’re not masculine enough, not macho enough” and was told to be more aware of his “masculinity or sexuality” and the implication was that he was “too gay, or not masculine enough to be a principal dancer yet” (R1, 3, L 833-835, 841-843). Another respondent learned about sexual stigma early on in life, in fact while he was at school; and the stigma caused him to be subject to much ridicule in the showers and changing rooms at school (R2, 2, L 60-62). This feeling of being different was further heightened by the fact that his vocational interest in dance was so different from that of other boys of his age (R2, 2, L 65-67).

Respondent 6 states that there exists this stereotype whereby “anybody that goes into the theatre has to be a bit gayish” (R6, 2/1, L 17-18). This respondent was insightful in terms of his perception of dance. He states that dance is “soft” but he goes on to state that ballet can be “both masculine and feminine”, it’s not about the movement itself but it “depends on who
does them” (R6, 2/1, L 391-396). Even though some male dancers like Nureyev and Baryshnikov, at the “height of their powers” and careers were certainly viewed as very “manly and masculine” but as an art form, “it looks to me that it appeals more to homosexual men than to straight men” (R6, 2/1, L 401-406). He sees that dance “allows someone to express...their emotions and feelings” and that is “seen as being very feminine” and that is a result of our “cultural conditioning” (R6, 2/1, L 410-416). Respondent 6 states further that although dancing as a career has greater legitimacy in current times; it is still “not considered to be masculine” (R6, 2/2, L 52-58). Respondent 6 says a dancer (as a professional) also has a limited life of about ten years, but after that “there are no real pathways for them to” make the transition to “teacher, administrator or choreographer” (R6, 2/2, L 70-72, 77-80).

Respondent 7 articulates similar sentiments on this issue. He does not see dance as being just for girls, but rather has different about different forms of “fluidity and expression” where its physical aspects are considered to be masculine, but, when it’s about “coming to terms with your emotional side, your creative side, the expressive side, that’s considered to be more feminine rather than masculine” (R7, 2/1, L 395-409). He sees people tending to equate classical ballet with being feminine but not the more contemporary styles of dance (R7, 2/1, L 419-423).

Respondent 4 does not consider dance to be feminine, but he does draw the distinction that “the artistic side of man is considered to be the feminine side or the softer side, and that’s why people call it feminine” but he was never criticised as pursuing a feminine pursuit because as he states, he was “quite macho on stage” (R7, 2/1, L 49-54). Respondent 5 echoes similar thoughts on the issue, and his belief that people who see dance as feminine are people “who aren’t that informed about what dance actually involves...but once you know the hard work and the physical aspect and how you have to be the type of person to succeed in that area” they will change their mind (R7, 1/3, L 1201-1204).
The final part of this section deals with what it is like for these dancers to live their lives as dancers. Respondent 1 sees his living his life as a dancer as sometimes taking your life in your own hands, especially when he lived in Glasgow, where “just the way you walked was likely to get you beaten up” (2/2, L 1793-1795). He still feels that there is still a prejudice against professional dancing, especially from “people who don’t go to ballet” because the prevalent feeling is that the “man should be a breadwinner…providing for his family…he should be staying at home, he shouldn’t be going out at night” (R1, 2/2, L 1826-830).

Respondent 6, on the other hand, finds the dance world very competitive to the point that he would not find a partner from the dance world, because what he needed from a partner is someone “supportive” rather than someone who is competitive (2/1, L 354–359). He also sees that at some point in his life, he was “extremely self-obsessed” but they were not “necessarily the happiest times” in his life (R6, 2/1, L 354–359). He also sees dancing as fairly demanding and people become neurotic about their own body, and they end up not liking their own body and he stated that “I’ve never known a dancer to actually like their own bodies” and are generally “not happy with the way they look” (R6, 2/2, L 169-175).

Respondent 6 sees dance training as being exacting where there is “a right way and a wrong way to do anything, to do everything” and this seeking and pursuit of perfection is like “almost trying to achieve things that are humanly impossible, but the striving to achieve them…bring you close to achieving the impossible” which is “really quite extraordinary” (2/2, L 184-202). In the training of a male dancer, it is learning of roles that is emphasised. There are aspects of the training where dancers are “designed to exhibit particularly masculine traits” but, this training can make it more difficult when you are trying to come to terms with your (non-heterosexual) identity/sexuality at the same time (R6, 2/2, L 261-262, 302-304). He came to terms with his sexuality in his mid teens, so he did not have that problem with his sexuality, but if he did not, he states that it would have been harder (R6, 2/2, L 304-306).
Respondent 7 has an entirely different viewpoint as he comes to term with his being differently able. He sees that “to be totally comfortable with his sexuality, I need to be a fully functioning person” and these “expectations” and “pressures” he sees as coming “from the outside world”, and it’s “a physical thing”; unless “you can feel a sexual person, then it’s not likely that anybody will be sexual with you, because you cut off the possibility of being sexual together” (R7, 1/3, L 1560-1586).

The next part of the analysis will look at the psychological issues that affect or impact on the lives of these dancers. Respondent 1 identifies his own psychological makeup was a stronger influence in his career than his family (2/2, L 1540-1541). It was his “psychological need to pursue...the talents” that he had which ultimately was a “huge influence on me deciding that I was going to do it (dance) full time” and to pursue his love for dance “further and deeper, and more seriously” (R1, 2/2, L 1547-1555).

Respondent 5 tells of the confusion he felt when he was still training at the ABS and when he had not fully attained his current sexual identity and orientation (as gay). He did feel attraction for women then, and that was a confusing rather than a difficult time for him, as he was aware of the concept of being gay and bi-sexual but he “definitely didn’t have it all sorted out” because he can remember being “very much attracted to men from as early an age of eleven” (R5, 2/1, L 658-672). He did with time sort out his sexual identity.

Respondent 6 tells that “I do not see myself as gifted” but sees himself as being a hard worker with a good brain that has given him the talent, a “good intellect”, and a “good aesthetic sense” (R6, 2/2, L 1144-1157). He has never felt fulfilled as a dancer, he saw himself as enjoying doing certain roles but he never had any sense “that I was very good at them” (R6, 2/2, L 1299-1302). He also felt greater satisfaction from his choreography and teaching, more than he ever did as a dancer (R6, 2/2, L 1310-1314). Despite the fact that he has had great success for one of his pieces of choreography, the sad part for him is that he has
“never been asked to do another work by either company” (the AB or the Australian Opera) (R6, 2/2, L 1310-1314).

Respondent 7, from an early age, felt ashamed about learning to dance and he could not understand why, but they did make him feel that what he was doing was wrong (R7, 1/1, L 969–975). But, it was the car accident which left him a quadriplegic, which left the most psychological and emotional scars. He did not believe he was a sexual person, and lost all sense that he was attractive as a person after the accident because to be attractive involved being physically standing up, “having his six pack abdomen and walking” (R7, 1/1, L 337-361). This changed the way he perceived himself physically and sexually (R7, 1/1, L 387-388). The immediate consequence of his accident left him with the fear of being alone as if “something was gonna happen” and would not let his mum out of his sight (R7, 1/1, L 387-388). He had to relearn everything again and “it was all just horrific” – going to the toilet, not having any sexual feelings, a total change of lifestyle and learning new things (R7, 1/1, L 1303-1333). He claims to be lucky that he has been able to take care of himself now (R7, 1/1, L 1335-1336).

His biggest challenge was to find other ways of continuing to dance and to keep the hope that he would recover (R7, 1/3, L 36, L 61). During the course of his rehabilitation, he learned that you “could not heal a spinal cord injury” so he began by “secluding himself away from everybody” as he did not want anyone to see him that way – disabled (R7, 1/3, L 194-195, L 207-208). He went through periods of depression and anger, because he saw his “disability” as meaning “he was fully dependent on someone else” (R7, 1/3, L 218-225, 308-315). Once he started experiencing life again, which was “extremely hard”, and then finding someone who showed him he could dance again, he stopped looking at the mirror, and began to see differently – “I stopped seeing my disability, and I started looking at my abilities” (R7, 1/3, L 423-427, 507, 661, 705-707).
5.2 PROBLEMS – PROFESSIONAL

These next set of issues deal with specific problems the respondents faced in relation to their professional lives and careers. To discuss these issues as one category titled professional would be inadequate to include the subtleties and differences involved. With this in mind, I have chosen to categorise these issues under a number of different headings namely, training to be a dancer, performing in a company, being a dancer, being a choreographer, management of a company, and finally, a changing outlook.

5.2.1 Training to be a dancer

All respondents identified their dance training as an issue or a problem with which they had to contend. For some of the respondents undergoing formal dance training also meant having to leave home to move to a new city to undertake this training. Therefore, the issue of having to adjust to a new environment heightened their sense of anxiety.

Respondent 1 recalls having to leave home in Ireland to go to London to attend the RBS at the Senior Level. He felt that the training he received was “brilliant” but found the other students there “blindered” as they had, he felt, “spent probably the most important years of development in that one building…under the same system…of the same organisation …primed to go on to the professional level” but “encapsulated by the one environment for so long…in the isolation of the school, and the isolation of the dance world” further exacerbated “putting these people in a boarding school in the dance world at age 12” which he felt was not really for him (R1, 2, L 1575-1592) and would not advise it for anyone else.

Respondent 2 also trained at the RBS in London, a place he felt at the time was the best training in the country as it was the flagship school of the nation (1, L 246-249). He saw their emphasis as being on “perfection” with being the best that you can be and he felt he was always under scrutiny (R2, 1, L 254-256). As the level of talent at the school was high, he also felt the need to find his place in the structure of the school and to develop his sense of
professional determination” (R2, 2/2, L 502-505). He adds further stating that ballet training was “based on received learning” where it was so “disciplined to the degree that there was no communication whatsoever with the teacher” and “one never questioned, one never challenged” implying a very strict disciplinary order (1, L 199-201). He also remembers at school that he was taught “largely out of fear”, and that considered “in some ways as the norm” (R2, 1, L 219-220). His experience at the Bejart School (MUDRA) in Brussels subsequently, was entirely different, as contextually it was in the 1970s and the place of men in dance was being challenged at the time and as he puts it “we were seeing a more exotic kind of dancer coming out” pre-empted by the defection of Nureyev to the West in the 1960s (R2, 2/3, L 688-704).

Respondent 3 moved from New Zealand to attend VCASS in Melbourne. He found the atmosphere there quite relaxed, where he said you were allowed to “call the teachers by their first name; talk about Shakespeare lying down, but there was discipline in the dance side of it than the academic side of it” (R3, 2/2, L 91-93). This made his transition from New Zealand a lot easier and he “just loved it” (R3, 2/2, L 100). His subsequent transfer to the ABS which he felt was a “different environment…that was all day dancing…was structured and very strict” (R3, 2/2, L 119-122) but, the dance classes felt more formal, more professional, and with teachers that were more experienced and “just better quality” (R3, 2/2, L 139-148). The rules were strict but he felt that it was a sacrifice he was willing to make (R3, 2/2, L 177).

Respondent 4 on the other hand, began ballet training as a young adult, and he states he received the “full Russian training” which emphasised “good technique…theatricality”, and was taught what it was like “being on stage” (1/1, L 430-434). He also learnt enormous discipline from the company not just “in terms of technique, but discipline in terms of personal life also” (R4, 1/1, L 436–439) but also “the discipline of our dress, the way we travelled in our clothes…we had to uphold the tradition of the Russian way” (R4, 1/1, L 449-
Starting ballet as a young adult meant many adjustments for him, the first of which was having to familiarise himself with the steps being called out in French, but you start with simple exercises and “just work hard to improve yourself” he states (R4, 1/2, L 400, 408-409). Respondent 5, not unlike Respondent 4, began ballet training at the later age of 19 as up until then he trained in jazz and tap (R5, 1/1, L 628-633). He felt that he had absorbed a lot at the ABS, and that his background in jazz and tap, helped him to be the performer that he was (R5, 1/2, L 634-637). When he decided to take classes in ballet, he had to return home to live with his parents. Prior to that, he had been living in Sydney trying to start his career in the theatre (R5, 1/2, L 651-668).

Respondent 6 remembers starting dancing classes at the age of eleven and giving it up after a year and a half for two main reasons: first his father was horrified when he found out his son was doing dance classes, and the teachers he had at the time he calls “two harridans” made the classes “terrifying for him” so he chose not to return to them (1/1, L 13-23). He returned to full time ballet classes again at age nineteen (R6, 1/1, L 35-38) at the ABS and found that the first year “was difficult” because he felt that “the students take a long time to accept you” (R6, 1/2, L 789-790). He remembers never having been competitive with anyone else while at the school despite the fact that “there’s been competitiveness between male and female” at the school (R6, 1/2, L 346-350). He does add that “in men, that tendency to be competitive exists” and that “it’s quite instinctive to want to compete” (R6, 2/2, L 394-398), and that you are always comparing yourself against others (R6, 2/2, L 687).

Respondent 7 attended both VCA S and the ABS, so he was able to ascribe the differences of approach he went through at both institutions. The initial move away from home to join the VCA S was an emotional upheaval as he had never been away from his mum for the first ten or eleven years of his life (R7, 1/1, L 950-960). VCA S was where he grew up, made many friends, developed “a lot of good friendships” and learned a “variety of styles” to become a “versatile dancer” (R7, 1/1, L 518, 526-532). This was achieved despite
being told, at the time, that he did not have perfect feet for a classical dancer, which made him only more determined to work on his feet (R7, 1/2, L 798-804).

At the ABS, it was “a lot stricter, a lot more disciplined” and it while there he felt “you had to become what they wanted you to be…an elite classical dancer” (R7, 1/1, L 533-535, 543-546). He also felt that the discipline just got stronger, where you had to focus on dance almost “twenty four hours a day” in a “confining environment” that left you with little “room to breathe” (R7, 1/1, L 559-563). His only criticism of the ABS was that they trained you to be a technician, “not to be a creative artist, or be an expressive artist” but just a “technical machine” (R7, 1/1, L 628-634) and with that comes the loss of “creativity” (R7, 1/1, L 664).

5.2.2 Performing with a company

Two respondents made comments related to this section, about their transition from dance school to performing with a professional company. Respondent 2 admits that his adjustment to a professional dance company was “absolutely huge” (1/1, L 328-329) and had assumed that the change would just be a “natural progression from school” and had little understanding of where he had “placed himself, or certainly where the company had placed him, and that was right at the bottom of the heap” (R2, 1/1, L 332-342) What he learned was that while you are in a company you had to go through some “re-education to do, understanding about performance, and artistry, and your role within the company, and how to work with, within the structures of the company” (R3, 1/1, L 343-346).

During the course of his time as a member of the corps de ballet, the company implemented a change resulting in his having to spend another year as a member of the corps de ballet, instead of what he had expected, a contract as coryphée, a bridging contract before moving into a position as soloist after leaving the corps de ballet (R2, 1/1, L 400-404). This also happened at the same time when he was offered the opportunity of a lifetime to have his choreography presented at the Edinburgh Festival alongside that of Jiri Kylian’s work, an
opportunity which he reflects upon as “he was too young at the time to comprehend the opportunity that was before me” (R2, 1/1, L 410-415). All he could see at that time was that he could not audition for the work by Jiri Kylian and that his career hopes as a dancer were being dashed (R2, 1/1, L 413-415).

What he did learn from this experience was not just technical ability, but also about professionalism, in terms of preparing the body for the day, doing your own class in your own time, and to take that responsibility and “learn more about how to work and how to learn” (R2, 1/1, L 460-461, 476-477, 480-483). His decision to move to another company meant he lost many opportunities to choreograph (R2, 1/1, L 647-652). He moved after this to a company in Canada, LGBC in Quebec, where he found that all the training that he had undergone in the United Kingdom did not prepare him for the change of aesthetic that he required to work in Canada (R2, 1/2, L 850-852). He was then reluctant to give up what he had “spent so long refining”, as it had by that stage become quite a part of his identity, and to give it up felt like an “infringement of his identity” and a “dilution of the training” he had received (R2, 1/2, L 873-881).

Respondent 5 moved from one professional company (QB) to another (AB). While at his earlier company where he had spent about three years, he was beginning to get opportunities to dance lead roles, but this situation changed when he left as he had accepted a position as corps de ballet in the new company (R5, 1/1, L 687-694). He sees his new life in this company as being “more structured” but with opportunities to dance lead roles (R5, 1/1, L 704-715).

5.2.3 Dancing professionally

After being trained for so many years to be professional dancers, there is the expectation that these respondents would be successful in their lives as professional dancers. There may be some elements of truth in it, but they are not without their challenges either. This section deals with these challenges.
Respondent 1 talked about the challenges he faced as a dancer. He laments the fact that had he been a different dancer he would probably be a dancer with the RB, but as he points out he was too much of a “party boy” (2, L 1060-1061). He recalls the lack of a good teacher at the RBS, and how “really bad” the technique classes were at the first company he worked for his being less dedicated to his technique (R1, 2, L 1066-1067, 1081-1083). He discovered his dedication to his technique after an injury he sustained while he was a dancer in New Zealand. For the first time he got more dedicated to his technique which he took as a “sign of maturity”, going “back to his roots” and “rediscovering his dance” (R1, 2, L 1071-1073). He also states the learning of Balanchine’s technique at Jacob’s Pillow, as having a huge influence on him and it was this he credits as being responsible for him “refocussing on his technique” and “perfecting it” (R1, 2, L 1097-1099, 1104-1105). He also learnt from working with Balanchine dancers whose work filtered through into everything he did, and he took all that he learnt into his technique and performance because he saw that the technique focussed not only on “phenomenal technique” but also on “perfecting his choreography…and to be true to the spirit of his choreography…and characterisation…which is the focus of his dancing” (R1, 2, L 1202-1209). This focus helped him to realise that in dance, characterisation goes hand in hand with the steps and “they are not separate” so that when he danced Giselle, the “dance steps had to be perfect, and the character then would be…walking forward. It didn’t need emotion, it didn’t need a frown, it didn’t need tears, the simplicity of just walking forward was enough” (R1, 2, L 1236-1242).

Respondent 2 was a dancer from the age of 18 through to 25 years. He claims he was a “perfectionist” and “analytical” in fact far too analytical and at times quite destructive, and that explains his choice to go to Hong Kong as Artistic Director to work and prepare dancers instead (R2, 1/1, L 75-78). As a dancer, he was very tall with a “height of about six foot two” with an “aesthetic” that suited the “abstract neo-classical form” – he was “very much the sort of Balanchine dancer” which resulted in him standing out like a sore thumb within “the
British dance world” where he trained (R2, 1/1, L 825-829). While studying at the Bejart School, the males were spoiled and had “luxurious studios to do class in” much more so than the females (R2, 2/2, L 672-674). He recounts his time there at the school, where Bejart had brought “together the most extraordinarily beautiful boys” which made his time there filled with overwhelming sexual drive (R2, 2/2, L 856-859). In Bejart’s work at the time, “men were presented as objects of homosexual desire” which made them all appreciate the “physical beauty in each other” (R2, 2/2, L 861–864).

Even while he was dancing, he “never really enjoyed performing that much and that is why he “got out of it as early”, despite the acknowledgement he received from so many people and “applause every night”, he was so “self critical” which proved to be “quite self destructive” (R2, 2/2, L 974-979). For him dancing was about “perfection, that brings with it enormous burdens…particularly for dance…the human frailty…of the body and the mind” which can “play havoc with you…because…you don’t know how to handle yourself under those conditions” (R2, 2/2, L 1172-1184). He loved the ritual of the daily ballet class because he was “a strong technician” and “loved the manipulation of material” with his beautiful “legs and feet, and a very capable body, and…it was the pleasure of manipulating…my body and taking it as far as I could” which made it more challenging than a performance “ever was” (R2, 2/2, L 1212-1217). Throughout all that, he still found the environment around dance “punitive” (R2, 2/2, L 1194).

Respondent 3 talks about his time as a dancer when he skipped a rank in promotion, a fact he states which is akin to a “two edged sword”, where on the one hand its “fantastic and you get…to do the best you can with things that you’re given”, while on the other hand, he claims “in many cases I think I was given some things too early” (R3, 1/2, L 564-1566). Although, he did feel the promotion and all the attention he was receiving from the Artistic Director at the time was good for him, but he did have “a rebellious streak” and there were many times when it all felt too much, he would have fights with the Artistic Director, what he
calls the “spoilt brat syndrome” (R3, 1/2, L 606-612). There were many times when he did want to do things in the “very strict way…that the Director wanted” and they would fight, and this constant battle was more about him “trying to find himself as a person” and his “true self” (R3, 1/2, L 624-634). The Artistic Director had become “another mother figure” with whom he fought and they were still “fantastic friends”, a fact he reflects upon as being his lack of maturity (R3, 1/2, L 658-670).

Respondent 4 recalls one particular incident when his role was assigned to a principal dancer, which he felt was wrong, and “had big problems with” so he put on what he called “a temperamental turn” and made out that he was sick and stayed in his hotel room (R4, 2/1, L 574-578). He was reassured by the Artistic Director at the time that it “just diplomatic administration circumstances” that brought on this change (R4, 1/2, L 586).

During his time as a dancer, he talks of his being “a very hard worker, never missed a class” and during the course of the daily ballet class he found himself comparing himself with the other male dancers, “even the principals, who were much better dancers” in an attempt at “improving” himself (R4, 2/2, L 169-171, 177-179, 187). He adds further that every male dancer would “probably model themselves on a different male dancer because of their individual physique” and this modelling would also take into account their “personality” as he felt that watching other male dancers “brushed off” on him and others “enormously” (R4, 2/2, L 204-205, 210, 224-226).

Respondent 5 talks about his time with the AB, a company he moved too after his time with the QB. He felt that he had learned a lot after “two and a bit years” with the AB, but did at times feel some degree of frustration, but was adamant that “if I wasn’t getting anywhere and I wasn’t learning anything from being there, and I wanted to dance somewhere else, I could just leave” (1/1, L 334-338), but it is the choreographic and other opportunities assisted his decision to stay at the company (1/1, L 344-3447; 1/2, L 769). He adds that sometimes accepting casting choices made by the “choreographer, Artistic Director and others who work
on the ballet staff” have also been a source of frustration; he has never ever felt that he’s been left behind but “there was no recognition” that he had experience from the other company he had worked with (R5, 1/2, L 820-821). In stating this he also recognises the fact that promotion within the company is based on “ability…luck…whether they feel they should promote you” especially if the Artistic Director “takes a special interest in your career…then you’re gonna be promoted more quickly” (R5, 1/2, L 840-845). He adds further that during his time at the company, he has not been “cast in things that were going to then, lead me to promotion” (R5, 1/2, L 867-868).

This respondent also identifies one important fact that when he was with the QB, it was a smaller dance company the allocation of work is what he calls “even”, whereas the AB, being a bigger company, meant that he had to “push a bit harder…to be noticed…to be reliable and…trustworthy by the staff and director” and when choreographers come to the company the competition for roles gets a little “cut throat” if you want to be selected (R5, 1/3, L 680-681, 688-689, 691-697).

5.2.4 Choreographing professionally

In this section I deal with what the respondents felt about the task of choreographing from the point of view of their own experiences with the process. Most of the respondents had something to contribute to this section.

Respondents 1 and 7 identified limited problems in this area. Respondent 1 felt that the strongest abilities they should teach choreographers are “communication skills” as dancers today are “more educated” and the process of choreographing is “much more a collective effort” and needs a strong sense of the “aesthetics” in the dance (1, L 224-225, 238, 243, 260-263). Respondent 7 discusses his first piece of choreography, and how he felt when he undertook that process. It was a choreographic workshop, and he was working on a piece with fellow students, with his first feelings being that “nervousness” because there was the “dread of the unknown” of whether “the ideas you have in your brain…can actually be
realised through dance” (R7, 1/1, L 458-463, 481-490). The process of choreographing was achieved through showing them “what I wanted and where I wanted them to go”, a case of “very much me telling them exactly what I wanted” as well as “times of exploring ideas I did have with the dancers” (R7, 1/1, L 500-509).

Respondent 3 talked about his choreographic opportunities in terms of “breaking down the barriers” (1, L 936). He states that he got “frustrated with people…who are not willing beyond what they know” as the audience are not “more sophisticated in their tastes” (R3, 1, L 861-865) and that is why his most recent work was a “mixture of classical and contemporary” in order to break down those barriers (R3, 1, L 897-898, 937). He felt that he had “pushed” and “put” himself forward in “working with the best quality dancers, whether they be classical or contemporary or both” and that each opportunity to work “will determine the sort of work…that will turn out” (R3, 1, L 959-960, 964-967). Although he comes from a classical background, where he was “never given contemporary roles” as he was seen as “upright and classical”, and moved into a “more contemporary way of moving, but within a classical ballet company” so he sought out dancers who are the most interesting ones to work with (R3, 1, L 982-996).

Respondent 3 recounted the first choreographic work he undertook for a workshop, it was for him “confronting a fear” that was going to help him as a dancer eventually, as being a dancer was about “being able to be a tool for a choreographer” and to facilitate the choreographic process (R3, 1, L 1006-1011). He remembers starting with “six and a half minutes of music” which he really liked, and also remembers the piece being “very athletic…and about weight, balance…and at that time…had no process” as he didn’t know “what it was to have a process” (R3, 1, L 1016-1020). He “made up all the steps himself” because he felt “nervous about the whole thing” and worked out all the steps in the studio before hand, but states that now “I really do have a process that I find works well” and that has been achieved much through “trial and error” (R3, 1, L 1022-1027). It was taking a risk
and also accepting the challenge and that was his overriding motivation at the time (R3, 1, L 1036-1040).

His choreographic process involves his own “sense of musicality as a dancer” and finds the counting of “every single bar of music” as pointless, but instead he finds “phrasing” and also finds “ways that…feel musical” (R3, 1, L 1142-1144, 1165-1166). For him choreographing is about “communicating with other people to find solutions to certain things”, and he likens it someone “looking at it from the outside in” and that it’s the “natural extension” of the “sense of satisfaction without actually having physically performed it” (R3, 1, L 1178-1180, 1183, 1186-1189). He finds choreographing “more cerebral’ and he has “high expectations” of himself and feels he has been “successful on some level” (R3, 1, L 1197, 1207, 1212). He knows he wants to continue doing it, but is cautious about it too, and states that “when you feel you’re getting better…you sort of think well maybe I can do it even better’ and has brought him closer to “a higher level company…I was able to see performances and actually see the end result” (R3, 1, L 1214-1215, 1235-1236, 1247-1249).

Respondent 5 recalled his first effort at choreographing as difficult because of the dancers’ lack of experience with the way he liked to work. He preferred to “play around with the movement” and they were students who had never worked that way before (1/2, L 993-995). He choreographed a piece for a student film called Ballet Boy which involved dancing in two sections which appeared “towards the end of the film” (R5, 1/3, L 519-535).

He developed his own style of choreography later by getting the dancers “to do a lot of improvisation”, which meant he did a lot of collaboration with the dancers themselves (R5, 1/2, 997-1006). He is quite clear that his style is not about him “listening to the music and having every step and combination worked out” but instead saw him “depend a lot on the dancers for material…and stuff like that” (R5, 1/2, L 1006-1008). Despite the fact he was not taught improvisation at dance school, as it was “not part of the curriculum” at the time, but he has chosen to work that way, anyway (R5, 1/2, L 1027-1034). He recalls taking three weeks
to choreograph a six minute section for a workshop at the company (AB), but he had a concept inspired by a piece of music and from there his inspiration was from “things that I see, whether it be a kind of certain design elements, or certain images that I see in everyday life or in films” (R5, 1/2, L 1052-1054, 1064, 1080-1083).

His first choreographic commission was achieved in a different way in that he had one section of the piece already worked out on a certain group of dancers (from the AB) but he “got the chance to add some sections to it” by adding the individual talents of the dancers he was working with integrated into the piece (R5, 1/2, L 1236-1246). The experience with this company was one where “they were an extremely hard working company…who obviously enjoyed dancing the piece and they put a lot of hard work into it in that short time” and it worked so well that the piece was chosen as the final two to be presented (R5, 1/2, L 1261-1266). As he had limited time to get the work done for this commission, he relied on the use of video to record the many “different variations” of the movement, and this coupled with the videos he had of the rehearsals and improvisations he got the dancers to do worked well for him, in this instance (R5, 1/2, L 1306-1315). He states that he “likes the process of working with dancers and seeing what they come up with and what we can come up with together”, it’s the collaboration and the “creative ability in working out the movement” that is the key to his creative process (R5, 1/3, L 67-85). He stated he would love the opportunity to choreograph for “things other than ballet” too (R5, 1/3, L 105).

Respondent 6 found great success with two works that he did, one for the AB and the other for the AO. The piece he choreographed for the AB “opened in Sydney in 1985 at the Opera House, and was an enormous success…it got a standing ovation on an opening night” and its huge success allowed him to “foolishly think” that his future was assured (R6, 1/2, L 976-984). That outcome was never to be as both companies (the Ballet and Opera) “had invited me on numerous occasions to stage revivals of those works”, but he has never been “commissioned for a new work” since and that he claims “will probably remain the biggest
question marks” in his life till the day he dies (R6, 1/2, L 976-978, 983, 986-989). He laments that his choice to join the staff at the ABS meant a big sacrifice for him as he believed that if he had remained as a freelance artist “he would have had a bigger career as a choreographer” (R6, 1/2, L 1036-1038).

Despite all that has happened to him, he still talks of the experience he had overseas with the LFB as an invaluable apprenticeship that helped him make the transition from dancer to choreographer, and he states that “choreography can’t be taught, but it can be learned” because the innate ability to express technique in its physical form as movement, is a transitional phase which he sees as being “very difficult to teach” (R6, 1/3, L 871-884). As a choreographer he feels that choreographing is about communicating, with integrity with the music, about original expression from that person, that is capable of engaging an audience and “to share with them your imagination” (R6, 1/3, L 1022-1023, 1060, 1077-1078, 1105). He admits to being “consumed by the choreographic process”, which for him involved doing “a lot of research” and when choreographing something, he would go into great depths to find out as much as he can about something before choreographing it, and it is the “intellectual stimulation as well as the physical that has always attracted him to it” (R6, 2/2, L 958-974). He adds that as he ages, his feeling is that his best work is behind him as a choreographer but that does not upset him (R6, 2/2, L 992-998).

5.2.5 Change of Artistic Directorship

Only two respondents identified that a change of Artistic Directorship at the company they worked for had a major impact and influence on their careers. For Respondent 3, his relationship with the previous Artistic Director was at best stormy, as he felt too restricted by her strict ways, and as he was trying hard to find his own voice as a person (R3, 1/2, L 616, 626, 633-634). (This issue was previously raised in Section 5.2.3.) She became another mother figure for him – they would fight, but still remain friends (R3, 1/2, L 645-646). All that changed when the company got a new Artistic Director and he began to realise something
important: “when you have a certain directorship…you get this whole mentoring process, you are being mentored by one particular Director, and after you excel at it, then comes a new directorship and all that stops” (R3, 1/2, L 597, 604-605) resulting in him leaving the company at that time, to explore a relationship overseas (R3, 1/2, L 1093). He returned to the company a year later (R3, 1/2, L 1197).

Respondent 4 recalls his time with the Borovansky Ballet immediately after the death of Mr Borovansky. A new Artistic Director had taken over the company, an appointment she could not refuse but, she had previously refused a position as “Mr B’s assistant” because she felt Australia was too far away for her (R4, 1/2, L 1025-1026). Obviously, “Australia wasn’t too far away” when you are the Artistic Director of the company, he comments (R4, 1/2, L 1026). Upon accepting the position at the company, she quickly made her mark changing many things like “the garland dance from the full length Sleeping Beauty”, “changed a little bit of the choreography” and certainly “the boys wigs” (R4, 1/2, L 1058-1060). She had changed “the style of the company” and it was becoming more British, and that wasn’t favourable” (R4, 1/2, L 1109-1110). Despite all this, she had managed to secure the funding for a permanent National Ballet Company with herself as Artistic Director, and this respondent even managed to secure a soloist position with the first Australian Ballet Company (R4, 1/2, L 1168-1179). He goes on to state that he “would not accept anything below” a Soloist position, because as he puts it “she had me performing so many soloist roles” in the old company (BB) (R4, 1/2, L 1178-1180). He thus became a founding member of the AB.

5.2.6 Becoming a teacher/administrator

Two respondents talked about the change in their dancing and choreographing career, to that of a teacher/administrator. Respondent 2 accepted a position as guest choreographer with HKBG while he was studying to become a dance teacher, but, that led him to being offered a job as Acting Artistic Director with HKBC (R2, 2/1, L 150-152, 176-177). What
started out as an option to “move away from performance” as he found it “very disillusioning to perform”, led to a management position with a company (R2, 2/1, L 164-166). This was followed by two years as Artistic Director with the HKBC but political turbulence in China made him seek an alternative position in South Africa with the NAPAC Dance Company (R2, 2/1, L 188-190, 259-262, 267–268). A friend, worried about his safety in South Africa, caused him “to step down and…allow an African, ultimately a Black African to head the programme” (R2, 2/1, L 303-312). He returned to the UK after that, attempted a masters degree in dance, but left the UK as a result of the “homophobic” and “intimidating environment” (R2, 2/1, L 406-410, 411-412, 484-485) and moved to New Zealand allowing him to be reunited with his partner (R2, 2/1, L 549). This issue was also raised earlier in Section 5.1.3. He finally got an appointment as Director of the Dance School in New Zealand, an appointment he still holds and confesses to being “very contented” but unsure “where I could go from here” (R2, 2/1, L 675-676).

Respondent 6 who never received any further choreographic commissions from either the AB or AO (R6, 1/2, L 1027-1028) decided to embark on a teaching career instead, as a staff member of ABS (R6, 1/2, L 1037). His perceived he was unfairly dismissed from his teaching position and asserts that it was about “my authority, and my knowledge seemed to be unsettling to her” (R6, 1/2, L 1201-1202) the new principal of the dance school. It was this teaching position he would have loved to retire from (R6, 1/2, L 1225-1226). This dismissal was “two weeks before Christmas”, and he had just bought a new house with “a large mortgage” (R6, 1/2, L 1216-1218). His personal and emotional life suffered after all this, he sought advice from a psychologist (R6, 1/2, L 1264-1268), he attempted to resettle to Sydney, but that did not work out either, so he took ABS to court, and was given an out of court settlement (R6, 1/2, L 1400). This was followed by a part time (0.5) teaching position at the VCA, and a half time job at Danceworks, and in 1998 he was offered a full time contract with the VCA (R6, 1/2, L 1403-1409, 1437). Now, life has settled down a lot more for him as a
dance teacher at the VCA. The job had been “very good to him”, it has been “supportive” and what he feels is “a much more professionally run organisation” as a result of its links to The University of Melbourne (R6, 1/2, L 1528-1532). He adds that “there are no real pathways” for people to make the change from dancer to teacher or administrator, they do it, he states “at their own volition and own determination” and he did it “not as a way of running from other things” but rather as “doing something” that he really wanted to do (R6, 2/2, L 77-80, 92, 99).

**5.2.7 A changing outlook**

Respondent 7 had to find a new outlook on life and his dancing after a car accident in South Africa left him a quadriplegic. It was a chance meeting with Kitty Lund in NYC in early 1999 that changed his life forever, when he saw at a ballet class he went “wow, she’s really dancing” and she was a “professional dancer….she preferred to dance using a chair than not at all” (R7, 1/3, L 569-579). The technique he employs now in his dancing was “developed by Kitty Lund” (R7, 1/3, L 586). After meeting her, he took the challenge and went into “open class” which was for him akin to “facing all your worst nightmares in one” but he learned to stop looking at himself in the mirror to a point where he stopped looking at his disabilities, to focus more on his “abilities” (R7, 1/3, L 622-624, 650, 705-706).

He returned to Australia after spending six months in the United States, got “back into training, got back into classes” and started to prepare for a performance season, which made him realise what he really loved “was performing” (R7, 1/3, L 905, 911-913, 935). “I came back with a new lease on life” he stated, and committed “to continue dancing here in Australia” and did so by launching his own company (R7, 1/3, L 942, 946-949). His dancing helped him to regain his passion for dance and to also explore choreography and he “realised…this new sense of freedom, which was movement, I found my movement again, my ability to dance, in a different way, but it was freedom to move” (R7, 1/3, L 977-981, 984-986).
5.3 SKILLS – INNATE and ACQUIRED

In the preceding Sections 5.1 to 5.2, I identified and discussed the problems the respondents encountered during the course of their lives and careers. While they engaged in resolving these problems, they called upon and relied on the skills and skill sets they possessed in order to overcome these problems and obstacles, to allow them to continue with their lives and careers. It is in this that they are inter-related and linked.

I see skills people have as comprising of two distinct groups – namely, those that are innate, instinctive, and intuitive to the individual person themselves, and then there are those skills which are acquired along the way, through learning and training, and through experiencing life. It is through these two categories that the next section is presented.

It is also worthwhile stating at this juncture that the problems the respondents encountered during the course of their life time would be intrinsically linked to their innate skills and those they acquired. The acquisition of these skills will assist them negotiate through the maze of problems they had encountered. It will therefore be of no surprise that they will be areas of overlap within this section and that discussed in the previous sections. This area of overlap will be represented by some degree of repetition of issues.

5.3.1 Skills – Innate

I begin this section by looking and discussing those skills which are innate to the individual. These skills are usually those which we are born with, for example, those relating to physique and/or body per se. They can also relate to those skills like determination, motivation and other skills so intrinsic to a person that is makes them what and who they are.

5.3.1.1 Interest in music

Respondent 1 explains music has been integral and has played an important part in his life. He remembers his life as a child “putting on Strauss records and moves the furniture and
dances around the lounge” and that is how it all started “jumping around the living room to Strauss waltzes” (1/1, L 120-124). He also recalls the time when he was about thirteen dancing the sailor’s hornpipe for a school show, the pianist had forgotten to repeat a section of music, so he just skipped a section of the choreography, “reworked the choreography in my head as I went along, sort of made up a few bits and finished at the right time” (R1, 1/1, L 126-128, 131-133). His teachers had considered that “phenomenal” and were stunned that he had “finished on time” and he states that it would not have been possible without his “musicality” (R1, 1/1, L 131-134).

He adds that his “choreography comes out of the music” and he finds it difficult to just “ignore the music” and he found it much easier to work with “musical choreographers” (R1, 1/1, L 135-140). He also recalls, that as a choreographer, he found that dancers “are going to remember quicker, a lot easier if it’s musical”, and as a dancer “music and the emotion behind the dance were much more important” as performance “was all about interpreting the music and the emotions and characters” (R1, 1/1, L 146-153). His first entrée into choreographing was when he was sixteen and still living in Ireland, it was naïve and it was based on music, and he “just moved to the music”; it never got performed as he relocated to the RBS (R1, 1/1, L 400-403).

The other respondent who identified with this skill, recalls excelling in music in school as an academic subject because for him “it supported dance and dancing”, but as he excelled at it, it gave him lots of enthusiasm as it was a “creative art form” (R2, 1, L 82-84). Despite playing the cello at school, he wished he had continued it at school, such that he would have had a greater knowledge of music (R2, 1, L 84-85). For him, dance is about creating something with a person’s body and with music, you “create it with an instrument” (R2, 1, L 85-87).
5.3.1.2 Physiognomy

A person’s skeletal body is something they inherit from their parents. But, certain inherent skills, predispositions and abilities come with the body, its physicality and its physiognomy (this issue is similar to that discussed in Section 5.1.2.) This physiologically inherited body proved advantageous for some of the respondents in this study.

Certain family traits are inherited, for one respondent it was the characteristic huge calves which in some ways was a blessing but in other ways, was a hindrance in dance (R1, 1, L 1633). His big calves helped take “an awful lot of workload off my thighs” so if he had to do “small quick jumps” he was well equipped, but when it came to do big jumps…I wasn’t so well equipped” (R1, 1, L 198-204). All this was in addition to what he considered his body to be: his legs were “straight and pointed in the right direction” and his body was “well proportioned’ (R1, 1, L 194-196).

Respondent 2 states that dance has two components: a physical and an aesthetic requirement (1, L 101). He also states that he had “very beautiful legs and feet, and a very capable body” with a “physical aesthetic’, as he was “very tall” which was “not a particular characteristic for a male dancer at the time” (R2, 2/2, L 1211-1215, 1239-1243). This did not help his career at all as there “wasn’t much in the standard repertoire coming out of Europe that would really give me the opportunity I wanted”, so he decided to move to North America (R2, 2/2, L 1243-1245).

Respondent 3 remembers his time at the ABS which he started at a young age, which made him less physically strong than the others (2/2, L 669). He attended the gym classes at school, which most of the others did not attend; and he even consulted a nutritionist to get a diet that would help him gain more weight, and supplemented this with gym work three times a week (R3, 2/2, L 672-674). His lack of strength did have a tremendous impact on his self-confidence especially when he had to do partnering work (R3, 2/2, L 675–676), to the point where “pas de deux work” which can be fun and exciting; for him “never fun…it was always
pretty terrifying” as he was never physically strong naturally (R3, 2/2, L 678-685). He says that he’s still going to the gym and that he’s been going to the gym his “whole life” (R3, 2/2, L 690-691).

This respondent’s lack of a physically able body proved to be his biggest obstacle and yet his most defining feature and characteristic in the end. He spent about six months in rehabilitation after an accident that left him a quadriplegic (R7, 1/2, L 1216). This long period of rehabilitation involved physio and occupational therapy, resulted in his getting “hand strength” which was a gradual and “continual thing’ and as he puts it, “they just kept getting stronger and stronger” (R7, 1/2, L 1253-1254, 1260-1261). His rehabilitation also meant a “total change of lifestyle and learning, learning new things” like bowel and bladder care, which he learned to take care of by himself (R7, 1/2, L 1327-1328, 1331-1336). While relearning how to dance again in NYC he learned not to look at himself in the mirror, to avoid seeing himself as a disabled person, who was not upright or standing up, a perception he had of himself as a person and as a dancer (R7, 1/3, L 630-632, 661-672, 681-683, 689-693). He ultimately learned to accept his new self, and this he credits to his “strong frame of mind” as part of the “conditioning through dancing” (R7, 1/3, L 730-731).

5.3.1.3 Working with a relationship

Only one respondent commented on this issue being a problem he had to contend with in his career as a dancer. He comments about his relationship with his partner who was also a member of the same company as he was. He comments about the fact that he was often getting roles as second cast, and he rationalised it as he having plateaued in his ability a little, and that he had reached his potential in certain areas (R3, 2/2, L 757-765). This process gave him new insights and a “better understanding” of himself and he sought to “investigate other areas” and as he puts it “some days you’re better at that than others” (R3, 2/2, L 783-784, 789-790). To cope with all this in a relationship when the other partner is chosen in first cast was “a bit hard to deal with” and he dealt with that on his own, a point he felt “could erode a
relationship, and there were times…it manifested itself somehow” (R3, 2/2, L 809-814). This realisation brought with it a certain degree of sadness for him and also made him realise that he had reached his potential and was “at that crossroads where” he had choices to make (R3, 2/2, L 830-832). He had planned a different future and outcome for himself. That was not to be but this helped him “come to a real place of honesty” and “emotional wrestling” to accept that maybe “I’m not meant to be in that place” (R3, 2/2, L 876-877, 890-898). This formed part of the discussion in Sections – 5.1.1.8 and 5.2.2.

5.3.1.4 Performing

Performing and wanting to perform, is an innate skill, some people have it while others do not. Only three respondents commented on this issue. Respondent 1 remembers “getting the bug” from an early age of four when the school he attended made it compulsory for them to learn Irish step dancing (1, L 159-160). Despite the closure of that school, he continued with Irish dancing, and he was even part of a school cabaret group that used to perform at dinner dances when he was about nine or ten (R1, 1, L 173-175, 180-181). He even recalls his first dance teacher who taught him to cultivate the skill of enjoying himself and performing, which he took with him throughout his dance career, and states “when I stopped enjoying, I stopped dancing” which is exactly what he did (R1, 1, L 173-174, 185-186).

Respondent 3 still finds dancing and performing ballet as a means “to express and gain acceptance for things” because he is “frightened of not being accepted” (R3, 2/3, L 474, 487). He does see himself as being gifted, but articulates it as seeing “that there are certain things I have talent for…skill base…I feel like I owe it to myself to fully investigate it before I move on….into something else” (R3, 2/3, L 514-515, 537-538). He feels the need “to produce things that…were special in some way…something special about them, and that, you know people wanted to see” (R3, 2/3, L 564-566).
Respondent 6 did a musical which ran for “three hundred and thirty three consecutive performances” and it was a nice experience, and it was a time when he gained “a lot of pleasure from my actual own physicality” (1/1, L 956-961). Dancing was something he had always wanted to do and despite the strict training he states “I’ve always loved rules”, but dance can in many instances make many dancers “are quite neurotic about their bodies” and never “happy with the way they look” (R6, 2/2, L 119, 175, 179). He sees the next generation of dancers as having less ambition than he did (R6, 2/2, L 1222-1223), he wanted to have a nice home while they (the new generation) are more philosophical about their life, they are happier because they are less driven and he says “I think they see that” (R6, 2/2, L 1265-1266, 1252-1253). In the end, he felt “self-fulfilled” with what he had achieved (R6, 2/2, L 1359-1360).

The next two sections deal with responses to the questions posed as to what they consider to be the qualities and/or skills inherent in a person as a dancer, and as a choreographer.

5.3.1.5 For a person and dancer

All seven respondents contributed insights into this section. Respondent 1 identifies the key qualities essential for any person is respect and honesty, and these go back to his experiences while growing up with is family (1, L 657-670). He states he is a “terribly logical person and judges people on face value…on how I see them…how they treat their work and how much effort they put into their work” (R1, 1, L 812-818). He states the following skills as being integral in making a good dancer: dignity, musicality, sincerity, a good body and a good technique, pause for thought, intelligence, a good receptive listening ear and good artistry in relation to music and the visual arts (R1, 2/1, L 11-15). Dignity, he states is key to “be able to take on different roles” and to being “sincere about your dancing” (R1, 2/1, L 20-21, 36-37), and just having “lovely long legs and lovely long arms” isn’t enough, it is also about your artistry (R1, 2/1, L 92-94) and having the intelligence to be able to interpret roles,
to do characterisations and interpret movement (R1, 2/1, L 108-112). Having a good listening and receptive ear is also key states this respondent, as dancers are there to “interpret the ideas of the director and choreographer” (R1, 2/1, L 116-120), and as dancers in a company, they have to work together as a unit, for without it, “you’re not working for the same thing and the synergistic effects are lost (R1, 2/1, L 130-132, 140). The final quality this respondent adds to the list is truthfulness – “truthful to the music, truthful with yourself, being honest with every part of their personage, their sexuality and with who they were…the truthfulness comes through in a performance” and this integrity in a performer is “just beautiful” (R1, 2/2, L 1960, 1966, 1975, 1983-1985, 1987-1988).

Respondent 2 speaks of musicality as being important (as discussed in Section 5.3.1.1) and “a good brain helps” too (R2, 1, L 100), but also people who are capable, with a work ethic, artistry while capable of engaging an audience, and intelligence with an aptitude to learn the material, of course not forgetting; dancers with good technique (R2, 1, L 102-107). For him, being strong willed about what he wanted to do, which is to dance; was his source for success (R2, 2/2, L 263-264). He recognised the fact that he was “fortunately very talented” and he was also “male… a minority status” which he exploited, and by drawing attention to himself, he was given “privilege status” such that the treatment he received “was probably different to the rigours that the girls went through” (R2, 2/2, L 461-464, 474, 477-480). He stated training and inherent and natural ability would be advantageous, but there must also be what he calls the “X factor – a music communication that other people wish to see or hear or listen to…to communicate” (R2, 2/2, L 1372-1375), which is technically quite “extraordinary”, and “be able to translate it into something that somebody else can appreciate”, and “to transform all these things into a message, and communicate it to somebody else, so the audience feels the same way” (R2, 2/2, L 1379-1386).

For Respondent 3, an ability to “assimilate information and apply it” to whatever context, is important. In addition to, tenacity and a sense of humour, and “being able to laugh
about situations” can help you get through difficult situations (R3, 2/1, L 224-228). A high level of self discipline is also a need he ranks highly, in terms of being self regulating and self motivating (R3, 2/1, L 232-234).

He cites taking instruction and taking criticism as important and comments that dancers take instruction well but they tend to “take criticism and turn it against themselves, instead of seeing it as a way of making themselves better” (R3, 2/1, L 242-245). He adds further that some dancers have the tendency to, as he puts it “totally identify ourselves, define ourselves by whether or not we’ve achieved that (sense of perfection), as opposed to that that is a part of our whole existence as a person” and hence making criticism of their technique “self destructive’ by turning it “against themselves” (R3, 2/1, L 273-281). But, this can usually be offset with what most dancers possess – a strong sense of ego, without which they would not have gotten to where they are now (R3, 2/1, L 287-288).

A good memory for remembering French terms in ballet helped this respondent during his training, he was amazed by how quickly he picked up the steps and he still remembers the terms (R4, 1/2, L 400, 404, 406). He recalls starting with “simple exercises” and just worked hard to improve himself (R4, 1/2, L 408-409). For him, learning and executing the moves were enjoyable and as he was “more determined” he worked harder to “execute the steps better every time” (R4, 1/2, L 436, 446, 457). He also comments about the physicality of the training, but cites that he had his youth in his favour and that there were rest periods between performances, with occasional exceptions when he was feeling “overtired or stressed” (R4, 1/2, L 817-820, 832).

For him what makes a good dancer is the “ability to learn all the various character dances”, knowing those “different types of dances” made you feel very comfortable doing character as he saw ballet involving “an acting role too” (R4, 2/1, L 157-166). He attributes some of his success to being gifted, but felt that most of it was “just a lot of hard work”, and
he was happy to do it as he found that “it was definitely” his destiny to dance (R4, 2/1, L 982, 1004).

Respondent 5 states a “good stage presence” as a definite must have, coupled with “an ability to adapt to a lot of different situation”, in other words flexibility, but not in the physical sense here (R5, 1/3, L 341-343, 347-351), musicality, expression, natural ability (R5, 1/3, L 360–368) and the ability to express things without words as “dancing is about being able to convey this message across” (R5, 1/3, L 388-397). A good sense of humour he also finds important, to be able to “laugh at yourself” and “at others”; to “be accommodating” such that you are “able to work well with other people” and still be self confident and be determined (R5, 1/3, L 1431-1442, 1449-1451). Setting goals for yourself and seeing them through is also key, and coupled with a strong sense of self, he feels you learn how to separate the negative from the positive, to be “your own self” and in order to do that “you must be very strong” (R5, 1/3, L 1452-1457, 1467-1471, 1493).

For Respondent 6, dancing should be about “old fashioned” entertainment (R6, 1/1, L 807-808). For him to be a dancer involved a certain “level of at anxiety” to dance what the choreographer wants rather than to dance “the inner self” (R6, 1/1, L 901-907). To be a good dancer “firstly you have to be born with the instrument” some people “can transcend that and work hard, but basically you have to have a certain physicalness” (R6, 1/3, L 166-176), and that has to be combined with the mental and intellectual intelligence, with “a brain that functions and guides their bodies” and a love of and passion for dance (R6, 1/3, L 190-199). A dancer must also have a sense of performance, “a natural sense of performance”, with a “natural exuberance and liveliness about them”, and who is “well trained mentally and physically” (R6, 1/3, L 206-209). Dancers must also have a “strong sense of awareness” and a good knowledge of themselves, as entering the dance world affords you “a greater opportunity to investigate who you were or not” (R6, 2/2, L 553-559), to overcome the limitations of the body, to get more flexible, and to improve in ways that is
encouraging and brings with it a sense of satisfaction to the self (R6, 1/3, L 602-609). Finally, a dancer needs a “good intellect”, a good “appreciation of beauty” and also a “good aesthetic sense, hard work and intellectualism” to add to the natural ability inherent in themselves (R6, 1/3, L 1156-1157, 1197-1199, 1214-1216).

Respondent 7 states natural ability makes a good dancer, but a dancer must also have the “passion and love for the art”, with musicality to be able “to express the emotions”, and be determined and disciplined (1/1, L 346-347, 352, 382). A good dancer must have “honesty, integrity and sincerity” and he feels that he tries to be honest as he can, and there is purity in his work because he was honest to himself (R7, 1/1, L 172-181). He cites honesty and trust, as being valuable, as is the ability to be “accommodating” and “being able to listen” and to be intrinsically who you are (R7, 1/1, L 193-196, 211). To achieve all these you need to have determination, being strong physically, emotionally and mentally and to have the fortitude not take “no as an answer” (R7, 1/1, L 224-225, 237, 244).

Even after his accident, this respondent found “he couldn’t stop” his passion to dance, trying to “bottle it down” did not help or assist him, as he came to the realisation that “he was a physical person” and he loved to move (R7, 1/2, L 559-562). He had to find a new way to dance, and he found that “inner strength that kept him going”, with a “spiritual being that forced” him to keep going in honour of his friends who died in the fatal crash he was involved in (R7, 1/2, L 566-576). He always was a determined hard working individual even from his early days at dance school, and he was able to overcome all his limitations and weaknesses and also overcame the obstacles that stood in his way (R7, 1/2, L 798-799, 802-804). This persistence and determination also shone when he had to overcome his greatest obstacle – that of getting back to dancing as a differently abled dancer (R7, 1/2, L 1253-1274, 1327-1336; 1/3, L 36, 304, 334-355, 470-471, 507-508) and to “use things…and to develop things…of my own” (R7, 1/3, L 602-603).
He learned to dance again through sheer determination, and in a world of perceived imperfection; he learned that “there was always room for improvement” and for him “to once again strive for that perfection” (R7, 1/3, L 770-772, 841), by “having that determination, having that dedication, commitment to do something” that he believed in (R7, 1/3, L 871-872) – to perform again, to be “more expressive in his upper body”, and present his work “more so with his upper body” (R7, 1/3, L 1225-1226). (The discussion intersected with the discussions in Sections 5.2.1-5.2.4 & 5.3.1.1)

5.3.1.6 For a choreographer

The skills that make a good choreographer according to Respondent 2 are communication, impetus and sufficient inspiration, being articulate, being able to build trust through a substantial volume of established work, and the ability to make others feel part of the creative process (1, L 118-135). Creating empathy between dancer and choreographer is important, and this can be achieved more rewardingly by the giving of explanations, which he sees as the forefront of the creative process (R2, 1, L 145-147). A good choreographer is “less about professionalism” and more about “self confidence” achieved through trusting “their own material”, trusting the “creative process” and “the dancers” (R2, 1, L 168-171). He feels that if the choreographer has faith in you, “it’s reciprocal and that’s really enjoyable” (R2, 1, L 175-176).

Respondent 3 states that his choreography is about a broader musical sense – musicality, “you find phrasing…find ways that…feel musical” (R3, 1, L 1141-1142, 1165-1166). He states that the process is “more cerebral” (R3, 1, L 1197). For him the overriding motivation in choreography was that he actually found he “really enjoyed it…and enjoyed the fact that it went well” and that enjoyment is a mixture of things that are “really scary” and “really exciting when you see it come off” (R3, 1, L 1039-1049). He adds “the lighting, the theatrical setting, staging of it”…something he finds “increasingly exciting as well and is really integral to the whole thing” (R3, 1, L 1088-1090).
For Respondent 5, the process of choreography involves someone who is “approachable”, as you need to work “together towards something”, “someone who can work collaboratively” and someone who has communication skills, as he needs to use the vocabulary of ballet to choreograph (R5, 1/3, L 413-429). He also needs to be able to express ideas intuitively, have the ability not to offend the dancer, to be diplomatic, so as to actually “get people to do what you want them to do, in the way that you want them to do it” (R5, 1/3, L 452-456, 463-466, 478-480).

Respondent 6 saw choreographing as “marvellous self expression and that’s what it has to be” and it is about “one’s inner self…and aligning it to music” and it also has to do “with your own idea, your own persona…it is a very personal thing” (R6, 1/1, L 652-625). He feels passionate about choreographing, he is “absorbed by it, it does tend to take over my life” with his mind “totally preoccupied” with his work (R6, 1/1, L 967-972) as it is something “of my own…it’s an ego thing…doing something of yourself” (R6, 1/1, L 978-979). The creative process of choreography is “like a painting” he states, “like a painter choosing colours”, it is all these components with “you as the creative artist” (R6, 1/1, L 1002-1004).

A good choreographer he adds has to have a “creative imagination” that allows him not just to “interpret but also to think up ideas” which comes from having an “enormous imagination” and a “wide knowledge of all forms of dance”, a sense of the theatre, and have an interest in other art forms that extends beyond dance (R6, 1/3, L 340-346). This implies that they should be “cultured people”, in that they “appreciate music, art, design and not only appreciate it but to have a working knowledge of those other art forms” (R6, 1/3, L 347-349). They also need to have people skills, as he sees dance as, the “only creative art form where you’re dealing with living human beings”(R6, 1/3, L 361-364).

Respondent 6 sees some elements involved as being innate to the person, a love and a passion for the theatre, as you “acquire the knowledge out of a love and a thirst to know it” (R6, 1/3, L 422-434), to afford you the opportunity to bring “a sense of harmony and a sense
of beauty” into your work to elevate the “human spirit and condition” to that which is “uplifting” for the dancer, the audience and yourself as choreographer (R6, 1/3, L 934-938).

As a choreographer he sees himself as a “romantic” with a “romantic view of life”, someone who wants to “celebrate beauty”, to combine music and dance to produce something that is “truthful and honest” (R6, 1/3, L 641-647). He has been able to do all this because he sees that he has a “fairly wide appreciation of culture...like art and music and drama”, has social skills, like to be with people, interact with people, and with a good eye for design of dance, “the way you design the shapes of the body”, and “it’s the way that everything is put together” (R6, 1/3, L 678-691). He sees his hard work, passion and perseverance, his doggedness and ability to hang in there and keep working away at it, with a real appreciation for the beauty of life as also necessary for the job of choreographer (R6, 1/3, L 695-697, 705-710). Finally, it has to do with something innate, “something really born in you” because he could not explain it in terms of his upbringing” (R6, 1/3, L 791-793). Respondent 7 cites the abilities and skills necessary for a choreographer ranged from determination, discipline, creative, open minded, expressive, with good communication and people skills, and great physicality (R7, 1/1, L 390-412).

In their own ways, all the respondents have identified and exhibited a wide range of skills that are not only varied, but also collectively similar, implying to some degree that their collective experiences have aspects of commonality. There are areas of commonality and overlap in the discussions above with those in Sections 5.2.1-4, 5.3.1.1, & 5.3.1.5.

5.3.2 Skills – Acquired

These are skills the respondents acquired during the course of their lifetime of experiences. These skills were learned, acquired and honed during the course of their school life, their training, and through their experiences as dancers in professional companies and/or choreographic opportunities offered to them while pursuing their careers. In this section I
focus on these acquired skills. I begin by looking at the issues relating to their acquisition of skills in terms of their dance technique.

**5.3.2.1 Dance technique**

Respondent 1 sees that having a good body and technique is what it takes to be a good dancer, it is “not quite essential, but it makes it a hell of a lot easier…even with a body that is not perfect, you can still build up a strong technique, with exact coaching, methodical concentration on every little movement (R1, 2/1, L 84-87). (This discussion about the body mirrors the discussion in Section 5.1.2.) In his personal opinion, technique alone is not sufficient, a dancer had to have “artistry” which is the ability “to use” the good technique and knowing “how to control it” (R1, 2/1, L 95-97).

Respondent 2 echoes similar sentiments, and states that there is “a lot of emphasis on technique, and this emphasis is far “too extreme” and “we’re losing”, he believes that there should also be an emphasis on the “dancer” his/herself, as they are “the instrument for others interpretation” (R2, 1, L 105-107). He recalls how fortunate he was to be in a performing arts school “that recognised” him as being “very talented”, which resulted in his getting “from the bottom of the heap, to being the best asset that had ever walked out the door” (R2, 2/2, L 461-64). While attending school, he challenged the system and the school rules, but felt he was “completely protected” like he had “this invisible force field” around him (R2, 2/2, L 466-468).

Respondent 3, on the other hand, talks a lot of his training in the technique while he was at the VCASS and the ABS. He remembers taking extra dance classes with one particular teacher, while still at the VCASS. These “specialised” classes helped him to see that it was possible for him to go to “another whole level of expertise” (R3, 1, L 1510-1512). It also helps that he had a great respect for the man (teacher) himself, and he knew this man could take him “to another kind of elite level…to train” and that was what he wanted at the time (R3, 1, L 1516-519). Acquiring skills also means comparing abilities and technique with
other people in the school and company, and this respondent admits to doing it “all of the
time” (R3, 2/2, L 745-749). For this respondent, this comparison of skills increases his
awareness of his ability, and to see if when he reaches his potential, and this he did at the
current time (R3, 2/2, L 760-766).

As a soloist with his dance company, he tells of the daily ballet class, which is
sometimes for all, and yet at times, they break it up “into soloists and above” (R3, 2/3, L 193-
198), while he adds that at his company they have an “injury rehab” class which is usually
conducted “one on one or a one coach two person class” which he states is “good and its very
detailed” (R3, 2/3, L 210-213). This ritual of the daily ballet class allows and affords the
dancers to be “coached”, and their technique is being “refined”, but in a big class this means
the dancer has to be a little “self regulating” and take a “huge amount of responsibility” for
their own career (R3, 2/3, L 270-280). (I have attached an observation of a daily ballet class I
attended in the Appendix 3 which provides a context for the discussion in the paragraph
above.)

For Respondent 5, to dance for a large ballet company meant he had to learn to “pick
things up pretty quickly” but “there is a big support structure there” so he never has to do it on
“his own” (R5, 1/3, L 654, 658-659). There is a down side to being with a large company too,
you have more performances, and rehearsal time is a premium where you have “to get as
much out of it as you can” (R5, 1/3, L 661-672). Despite this fact, the training is hard and
involves a large physical aspect to it, this respondent agrees that dancers are trained through
the technique to make it look simple and to easy to help perpetuate this myth and create this
whole mystique about dance (R5, 1/3, L 1202-1223). This respondent spends time outside of
the daily ballet class to rehearse. He states that “if there’s one free (studio space), you just
jump in and grab it” and this is in addition to all the rehearsal time and the warm ups he does
individually prior to the daily class (R5, 2/2, L 680-693). This certainly adds much to the
maxim of practice makes perfect. (Elements of this discussion are closely linked to those in Sections 5.2.1, 5.3.11 & 5.3.1.5.)

5.3.2.2 Choreographic technique

This section identifies skills respondents have acquired in addition to those skills they see as being critical for a choreographer and/or for someone to be able to choreograph. All seven respondents had much to say and add to this section on choreographic technique.

Respondent 1 tells of his first attempt at choreography, although classically based; it was “very musical but slightly silly” but as he claims, the attempt was “very naïve and not very deep” (R1, 1, L 406-409). His next attempt was a contemporary piece, set to the music by Sting. Unlike his first attempt, the response was “phenomenal” and people “just loved it” (R1, 1, L 410-413). In this respondent’s opinion, to be a good choreographer means having all the skills of a dancer, but you “need them even more intensively” and he highlights the more important skills as being honest and sincere, with humility being “really important” (R1, 2, L 155-158). He states skills that are equally as important are: confidence, artistry, being “a wonderful musician”, imaginative and to “be wonderful at conceptualising”, to have inspiration, finally, to be able to look and examine yourself and that of humankind in the social and historical context (R1, 2, L 179-196).

Respondent 2 articulates the skills he finds important as being a good communicator, inspirational and articulate (R2, 1, L 119-124). He sees these skills as key because a dancer has to be the conduit for the choreographer’s intentions and inspirations, so his ideas must be communicated right “from the outset”, and he must provide the “impetus and sufficient inspiration for you to feel part of the creative process” states Respondent 2 (2, L 120-122, 133-135). A choreographer must also earn the trust of the dancers and this can be achieved in part by the “volume of work he has” behind him and by his involving you in the creative process, states Respondent 2 (2, L 126-135). Empathy is a skill worth having and being able to explain what he wants is important too (R2, 1, L 144-146). This respondent adds that the
professionalism of a choreographer relates to his “self confidence, trust of and in “their own material”, a trust in “the creative process” and a trust of “the dancers” he works with (R2, 1, L 169-171). He feels that there is a wonderful assurance if “the choreographer has faith in you, and therefore it’s reciprocal and that’s really enjoyable” (R2, 1, L 174-176).

Respondent 4 echoes similar sentiments about choreographers and their skills as Respondent 2. He states a good choreographer is one “you can feel immediately is so interesting”, so much so “you’re so keen to be totally engrossed by what they’re showing you” and goes on further to add that “you either click or you don’t, with a choreographer” (R4, 1/2, L 163-168). He agrees with the previous respondent that communication is all important, and to be able to “communicate his or her choreography to you” by both “showing and talking” and with dancers who are professional, they are able to “pick up immediately what” is required (R4, 1/2, L 190-195, 212-213). This respondent goes one measure ahead and he identifies a choreographer’s vision and the ability to express that vision is also critical for him (R4, 1/2, L 236-247).

Respondent 3 talks of the choreographic process (based on a recent piece of work) and expresses great delight with working with lots more people in the piece (16 in total) and this time he also “worked on costume, lighting, setting, staging”, all of which he loves, as he finds it “exciting as well” (R3, 1, L 1073-1090). He does not follow the conventional belief that the process of choreography must also always involve a visual orientation and musicality, because for him, these issues can slow the process down (R3, 1, L 1122-1144). He states the visual orientation of a piece can sometimes “be a hindrance” and can be distracting too, and “if you do not have that…you don’t worry about it” (R3, 1, L 1126-1129) and he is seldom “weighed down” by the music, he has his own sense of “musicality as a dancer” and he finds the “phrasing” and the ways that “feel musical” (R3, 1, L 1136, 1165-1166). He believes “music should be there” but he is adding “something to an existing art work”, so there is no need for him to “follow it so strictly” (R3, 1, L 138-139).
Respondent 5 learned a lot from his first piece of choreography. He learned “a lot about performing” and about “performing in different styles” and “different dance styles” (R5, 1/3, L 596-601). This respondent views choreography as being about “movement” and it is the combination of both physicality and lyricalness (R5, 2/2, L 329, 343). For him choreography can be gestural and that in itself can “still be really beautiful as well” and does not have to be “technically amazing” as the “essence of the choreographer is being able to create this…to let the person execute this…and to create something that the person can execute” (R5, 2/2, L 348-363). He also believes that what he does is to communicate through movement, and he has done this through watching other choreographers (and not imitating them) and through processing “different things over long periods of time” and trying to convey that message across in different and unique ways personal to himself (R5, 2/2, L 436-446). The process of choreography still challenges him, and he takes it on to challenge himself; to start from “nothing …and by the end of a couple of weeks” you have a whole piece (R5, 2/2, L 464-471). This respondent choreographs by getting “the dancers to do improvisation” but he also spends some time workshopping movements on his own, which gives him a “wide range of movement and styles to choose from” (R5, 2/2, L 525-526, 533, 552).

Respondent 6 begins most of his choreography with the music, it is “the most happy way for me to start” (R6, 1/3, L 107-111). For him choreography is “more than just putting steps to music, so therefore you’ve got to not only have the music, but you’ve got to have an idea of how you are going to present the music” and most of his ideas come from literature as his other love “of course is literature” (R6, 1/3, L 107-118). For him, in order to do a work from literature; “you’ve got to find the right music” (R6, 1/3, L 121-122). His creative process begins with “what you want to create…something that’s engaging…it is got to be communicative” and possesses “a spark of something that is essentially you” (R6, 1/3,
L 1014-1025). He believes wholeheartedly that the work must be “true to your inner self” and “if it comes from you, then it will be new” (R6, 1/3, L 1049-1052). The work should also have “integrity with the music” which is an original expression from that person to “engage an audience and to share with them your imagination” (R6, 1/3, L 1060, 1075, 1105).

Choreographers, he states, have a desire to share their art, and if their art does not share or communicate with others, then “it just goes nowhere” (R6, 1/3, L 1125-1128).

Finally, Respondent 7 talks of his first choreographic experience as being one fraught with nervousness, because “there was the dread of the unknown” as to whether “the ideas you have up in your brain” could actually be realised “through dance” and whether he could “paint the in my mind to realisation on the dancers” (R7, 1/1, L 486-490). His choreographic process involved showing the dancers “what I wanted and where I wanted them to go” which at times also involved exploring ideas that he had, and exploring ideas together with the dancers (R7, 1/3, L 502, 506, 508-509). (There is considerable overlap in the discussion above with Sections 5.2.2, 5.2.4, 5.3.1.1, 5.3.1.4 & 5.3.1.6.)

5.3.2.3 Working with a company

Only two respondents made comment on this issue as it affected them personally. Respondent 5 states experience with a professional dance company helps build self-confidence as it increases ability and competence with the language of ballet, and it helps to “make you feel better as a person” (R5, 2/2, L 48, 58, 73, 84-89) and gives confidence to want to “make that first step” towards looking for opportunities to choreograph (R5, 2/2, L 110-115). His opportunities to choreograph (while with the company) served to give him self-confidence about his own ability, but also to widen the scope of his abilities (R5, 2/2, L 827, 863). His experience with other choreographers for him becomes a frame of reference for his own choreography (R5, 2/2, L 870-885).

Respondent 7’s experiences are varied and self-illuminating. After his car accident, he had to find ways to keep dancing even though he was wheelchair bound. After his
convalescence, he learns to “adapt things” for himself and while studying with Kitty Lund in NYC, he learns “to stop looking” at himself in the mirror and learns “to accept” the image of himself as wheelchair bound (R7, 1/3, L 611-612, 641-642, 650, 656). For him this meant going against his own training and conditioning as a dancer, as it is intrinsic in the way he sees himself. His frame of mind, and the way he perceives himself, and this change extends to his own personal life where he now only eats “low fat...and healthy foods” (R7, 1/3, L 724-739). His own experiences with the world makes him want to educate his “brother with as much knowledge about the world and about his decision making in his life” (R7, 2/1, L 1032-1034). His need to continue to dance is about “being persistent, and being there” and not to take “the easy way out which is to just to go and hide under a rock” (R7, 2/2, L 111-114). This he did not do in his life. This discussion will undoubtedly reflect the issues raised in Section 5.2.2.

5.3.2.4 To value others

Respondent 1 speaks of his time with the WAB. He tells that people there “really appreciate each other’s talent”, but did not find that in the next company; he did make an effort “to instil it” there (R1, 1, L 599-601). In his first job after leaving dance, he tells of a “very friendly office” where “everybody was good friends” and they made more money than any of the other offices (R1, 1, L 604-607). In his work with other choreographers while still at the dance company, he tells of their influence as “opening up different ways of moving, of using the technique...having more eloquent” movements (R1, 2/2, L 1308-1311).

Respondent 3 tells he likes to go “to particular companies which are run by certain choreographers” rather than to seek out choreographers to work with (R3, 2/3, L 310-313) and this he did do when he was in NYC. He tells of opportunities to get direct coaching in solos and others, and counts himself lucky for “opportunities like that” (R3, 2/3, L 324-331). He also values the influence of other choreographers who have come to work with the ballet company, and they allowed him to “just grow so much” (R3, 2/3, L 346-353).
Respondent 6 talks of how he tried to model himself against many dancers, people he saw as his inspiration – Rudolf Nureyev for example (R6, 2/2, L 779-782), and also someone whom he states had “matinee idol looks....beautiful feet, a very intelligent boy, natural ability...and charm and charisma” who later “went on to become a principal dancer with the AB” (R6, 2/2, L 788-798). His own sense of achievement, being a member of the LFB for two and a half years; gave him a “sense of pride” and this association allowed him to “travel the world practically” and dance in some of the most “beautiful theatres and buildings” and this he values to this day (R6, 2/2, L 810-815, 840-842). The discussion above raises issues related to that in section 5.2.4.

5.3.2.5 To take risks

Respondent 3 talks of his first piece of choreography as a challenge and about taking a risk, and in itself, that was the motivation, and he enjoyed it and “enjoyed the fact that it went well” (R3, 1, L 1030-1046). This risk taking he does not see as being addictive, some get addicted to it but some others are “disciplined, have their career, and when they stop the just, they find it very easy to let go” (R3, 2/1, L 319-322).

Respondent 5, talks of dancing as a career where “where there are no real easy ways or even chartered ways” to leave dance, as there are “no real pathways for them...to make that change” (R5, 2/2, L 77-80) and in that it is risk, but, he sees dance as “something that you are passionate about” and something that he “really wanted to do” (R5, 2/2, L 92-99). This respondent in his decision to dance in classical ballet, acknowledges he took the risk of “gig down a fairly narrow street” and also acknowledges that” maybe it would have been better had I had a much more eclectic training, in terms of other things to do with the theatre” (R5, 2/2, L 580-584).

5.3.2.6 To accept criticism

Being a dancer and/or choreographer involves being able to give and accept criticism. Only two respondents made comments in this section. Respondent 1 tells of how he reworked
a piece of choreography under the advice of the Artistic Director, although he felt it “was still quite good” but the Director still did not like it, but he puts it down to the fact that “he’s very critical of other people’s choreography” (R1, 1, L 430-432). He also tells of a time when he did his first piece of choreography, he reflects upon it as being “naive and not very deep” but also understands the reason his work was not chosen for display as his work needed to be “more contemporary based” and therefore not seen as being old fashioned” (R1, 1, L 405-410).

From a young age, Respondent 7 was excluded and teased. He did not “understand why” the other boys teased him, but his mother comforted him at the time by saying they are “just words, ignore them” (R7, 1/1, L 975, 985). He remembers enjoying dance, but he also remembers the other boys made him “feel that what I was doing was wrong” (R7, 1, L 970-975). This may not be criticism per se, but its effects are similar.
5.4 DECISIONS MADE

This section assesses the range of problems experienced by the respondents. These problems bring with them a range of inherent issues these respondents had to deal with. In order to cope with these issues, they would have had to rely on their skills, both innate and acquired, to help them overcome these problems. Problem-solving process also involves the making of decisions, and it is these decisions they made which will be the focus of the next section of this chapter. It is of no surprise therefore that the issues raised here would undoubtedly intersect with the discussions previously on the problems (Sections 5.1 & 5.2), and the skills (Section 5.3).

People make individual decisions every day of their lives. These decisions maybe ordinary, routine, ‘run of the mill’ and programmed, but some may be seen as being vital and critical. The decisions we make are based on a large number of different variables like time, how we feel at the time and the situational context. Most of the time, we make decisions when we are not fully aware or cognisant of the impact or even the long term effects these decisions will have on our individual lives. But, we must make decisions, and the variables we take into account to resolve the issues surrounding the problems will ultimately determine the outcome that eventuates.

The dancer/choreographers have all made decisions in their lives, but what is most evident is that they all chose to dance, and make dancing their career. Many may have stumbled upon dance by chance or accident in their early lives, or may have had imprints or impressions of and about dance that started them on this life journey. Ultimately, theirs was a conscious and deliberate choice.

I have chosen to identify and evaluate these decisions in a linear time fashion: that is, from their childhood to the time of their retirement from a dancing career. Presenting their
decisions in this way will highlight the salient features of their experiences during each particular period of their lives.

5.4.1 The early years/stages

Respondent 1 said he “got the bug of performing, early on” with the emphasis on “getting the show on the stage” and he remembers he was good at picking up steps” (R1, 2/1, L 700-701, 722). As a child he did a lot of dance classes, music lessons and piano lessons, so his academic studies did suffer, but he did choose dance, and did give “up the chance for another career” and realises he did sacrifice “another career path” in music as his “love for music is a strong as my love for dance” (R1, 2/2, L 818-819, 822-824).

Respondent 2 states that dancing was a natural thing for him to do as he loved performing, “leaping around the garden” and making “performances in the garden” as for him it was a “natural expression” of growing, the “physical exhilaration of dance” and to move “without limits” (R2, 1, L 40-43). His decision to be involved in dance was a natural extension of his family’s theatrical background, and that fact, he feels, “provided a legitimacy for me to pursue a theatrical career as well” (R2, 2/2, L 13-15). His decision to dance was a result he “didn’t really believe in anything else”, and that was all “I ever wanted to do” (R2, 2/2, L 811-812).

Respondent 3 states that he started “ballet training, horse riding and school at four and a half” (R3, 1, L 243-245) and he did horse riding competitively too (R3, 1, L 273). His interest in dance was supplemented by his attending summer school dance classes and he admits “that was a place where I really started to excel” and even his father could see where things fit in for him at the time (R3, 1, L 338, 348-351). He also did acting, commercials and seen the “RNZB and Russian Ballet Companies” in New Zealand, and he began to realise “that there was a career” in dance available (R3, 1, L 353-355). This understanding that a dance career was possible also helps him to make the decision to move to Australia, with his mother, to attend dance school (R3, 1, L 360, 381-382).
Respondent 5 tells that from the age of ten to fifteen years, he did jazz and tap dancing and it was not until the age of nineteen that he did formal ballet training (R5, 1/1, L 628, 633-634). When he decided that he needs to do formal ballet classes in order to pursue the career he wanted, he returns home to live with his family, as he had moved to Sydney prior to that to try and start his professional career (R5, 1/1, L 651-659, 663-664). He leaves home again to attend the ABS and finds himself with a group of students whose ages range from 16–21 years, and he enjoyed being there with these “talented people” (R5, 2/1, L 624-626, 632-633). This in is sharp contrast to his high school days which he states as being “quite difficult for me...fitting in with people” and all he dearly wanted to do was to attend a performing arts high school like “MacDonald College or something like that” (R5, 2/1, L 215-217, 222-224).

Finally, Respondent 7 recalls vividly his childhood days. He remembers his childhood days when he “used to do a lot of back flips and somersaults, and a lot of acrobatic stuff around the house” (R7, 1, L 8-10). As he tells it, he “was a very acrobatic and very flexible” and dance was offered, so she puts him into jazz ballet at age 7 to channel all his energy efficiently, and it also helped that his mother’s best friend’s daughter was also going to the same dance classes as well (R7, 1, L 10-11, 14-15, 21-22). He was doing gymnastics at school, but he does not start any formal ballet dance training until his decision to attend the VCASS (R7, 1, L 27-28, 38). (The discussion here echoes that raised in Sections 5.1 & 5.3.)

5.4.2 At dance school

Respondent 2 stayed at RBS until the age of 16 to work on his classical technique, but he became aware while there at RBS the “focus was almost exclusively on classical ballet at the time” and as he states “I had a great interest in learning more about contemporary dance” and “when I got to 16, it was part” of his “youthful rebellious streak” to abandon all this and “go to the other extreme” (R2, 1, L 668-673). To do this he chose to go to the Rambert Ballet School as they had “quite a diverse programme of both classical and contemporary” and was eligible “after the first year to major in classical or contemporary” and he chooses “to major
in contemporary” much to “everybody’s horror” (R2, 1, L 675-680). He then made a conscious decision that “he needed another year of tertiary training” and chooses to attend MUDRA, the school established by Maurice Bejart which also housed the Centre for Choreographic Research (CCR), which focussed on “total theatre” incorporating “voice, drama, obviously classical ballet, contemporary dance, improvisation, percussion” (R2, 1, L 687-694). His move into contemporary dance was bold for the time.

Respondent 3 on the other hand while a student at VCASS chose to attend extra classes and coaching at the National Ballet School, and while he is there he meets the male dance teacher who also teaches at ABS (R3, 1, L 410-412, 422). It is this teacher who instigates his move from VCA to ABS (R3, 1, L 431). He does this with no general audition – he did a class with the school and they took him in for the following year (R3, 1, L 441-443). He achieved all this while still at the age of 14 (R3, 1, L 439). This decision to move to the ABS paid dividends for him in the future.

Respondent 4 began formal dance training as a teen, and at that time he was working as a “young junior clerk” (R4, 1/2, L 383-384). This decision to start at such an advanced age proves to be “strange at first” but with the passage of time he does not feel “embarrassed anymore…you would change into your ballet gear and do your class” he recalls (R4, 1/2, L 384–385) and learning the names of the steps in French “fairly quickly” and as he puts it “you just work hard to improve yourself” (R4, 1/2, L 400, 406, 408–409).

Respondent 5 during the course of his final year assessment, remembers the Director from AB being there, as dancers are “auditioning while being assessed” (R5, 1/2, L 350-355). He does not receive an offer from AB, but does receive one from the QB; and it was, as he points out “the only job I had at the point…so I was happy to go there” (R5, 1/2, L 385-388, 428-429).

Respondent 6 states he enjoyed his time at the Ballet School, despite the strict rules, as he puts it “I’ve always loved rules” and “it wasn’t as strict as the school I’d been to in
Sydney” and in addition “I saw it as doing something I really wanted to do” (R6, 2/2, L 99, 116, 119, 122).

Finally, Respondent 7 states his time and training at ABS helped with his technique and to become a strong dancer but more importantly affords him the “realisation” of “what I really want…to dance professionally as well, so it prepared me to work in a professional company” (R7, 1/2, L 958-962). This obviously helps him in his decision to pursue a professional dance career. He adds further, he “never actually looked back” and with his strong sense of direction, he accepts an offer to dance in South Africa after completing ballet school (R7, 1/2, L 1013, 1021, 1026-1027). Although, he was not to know at the time of the tragic accident to happen later in his life, but as he says, he never actually looks back on his life. (The discussion above raises similar issues raised in Sections 5.2.1 & 5.3.2.1.)

5.4.3 To move to another dance school

This subject area was also covered in previous sections (5.2.1 & 5.3.2.1), so only summary information will be provided here for Respondents 2 and 3, with the exception of Respondent 7. As I mentioned in earlier sections, Respondent 2 left RBS to attend the Rambert Ballet School for a simple and personal reason, and it was so he could pursue contemporary dance which was not offered at RBS (R2, 1, L 669). This he followed up with another extra year at Maurice Bejart’s school called MUDRA, and Maurice Bejart was one whom he calls a “big sort of cult choreographer” who visited London regularly, and obviously inspires him to do more (R2, 1, L 687-688). Respondent 3 tells of being strongly influenced by a male dance teacher he met while doing extra classes while still at VCASS, so he did a class at the ABS and was offered a place there, so he follows him to ABS a year later (R3, 1, L 441-443).

Respondent 7, whose experience is quite different from the other two mentioned above, did not deliberately leave VCASS in favour of ABS. In fact, he pursues his entire secondary education at the VCASS from “year 7 to year 12” as he states “I wanted to finish
my VCE first” (R7, 1/2, L 761-763). This he did by moving “across the road…to the ABS” and for him “it was a natural progression” (R7, 1/2, L 769-770, 772, 782).

### 5.4.4 While in a dance company

Respondent 1 chose the Artistic Director of the company he danced with in New Zealand as his mentor. For the five out of the seven years he was in the company, this person was the director of the company and he “would have been a big influence on driving me, and nurturing me” (R1, 2/2, L 1006-1009). He remembers how this man “put him in his first cast” when dancing overseas and also gave him “little opportunities to explore, and to develop” like “going to Jacobs Pillow” and opportunities to choreograph (R1, 2/2, L 1016-1020).

Respondent 2 tells of his years as *corps de ballet* with the Scottish Ballet. During this time, the company was “keen to promote young choreographers” and he took advantage of the opportunity to take “on a small commission for the company” and many more came “through the management of the company” (R2, 1, L 390-395). He accepts these challenges and felt flattered by the offers, but at the same time felt “disillusioned…being perceived in the eyes of the management as a choreographer, and not really a dancer” (R2, 1, L 395-398). He accepts this state of affairs until the end of his three year time as *corps de ballet*, when he was due for promotion to *coryphée*; but the company institutes a fourth year as *corps de ballet* he sees no other option but to accept it (R2, 1, L 400-405). He accepts this option again with the expectation that things will change in 1981 with the Edinburgh Festival, but instead he gets an offer for the “position of associate choreographer” at the time, a position he refuses as he is only twenty and believes “that he should really be dancing” (R2, 1, L 407-418). He did not get his promotion to *coryphée*, but got a contract as *corps de ballet* again, making it his fifth year as a member of the *corps de ballet* (R2, 1, L 419-421). He auditions with a company in Montreal and gets a soloist contract with them which he accepts (R2, 1, L 424-426).

Respondent 3’s experiences are a little different. He took time out from his position as soloist with AB to try and establish a relationship with someone he met in Australia who lived
overseas (R3, 1/2, L 1062-1076). This issue was raised in an earlier section (5.1.1.8). He found a job with the Basle Ballet in Basle, Switzerland, but his partner was dancing elsewhere, and they were only spending their summers together (R2, 1/2, L 1096-1120).

While he was in Europe, he was given an offer to return to Australia as he “was still in contact with my Director” from Australia, and “she wasn’t that happy about the company that I was in” (R3, 1/2, L 1126-1134). He was still reliant on his mentor from the AB to guide him in his decisions. His relationship in Europe turns sour and he makes the decision to leave Europe and returns to Australia after being away for just a year (R2, 1/2, L 1197). He tells of the time away, allowing him to grow up, giving him confidence and “rid him of all his rebelliousness” (R2, 1/2, L 1269-1274). His mentor stays on as Director of the company for another two years before a new Director is appointed (R2, 1/2, L 1316), but after the year away, the mentor relationship changes as he states he is a bit older, “less malleable and less needy” (R2, 1/2, L 1320-1321). He grew up and becomes more confident in himself.

For Respondent 5 who did not get into AB directly after graduating from ABS, he chose to stay at the QB for a period of five years (R5, 1/2, L 428, 464), and the decision proves to be rewarding in terms of the “experience on stage...to work with choreographers...creating a new work from scratch....and get some input into the work” (R5, 1/2, L 469-472). He also acknowledges the dancing opportunities he was offered were “a lot more than” than he would have had at AB and he also got to tour “America...and within Australia” (R5, 1/2, L 489-497). Respondent 5 makes the choice to move to AB after five years at QB, a decision which also brings its share of difficulties; the rehearsal schedule makes it tough to do anything else apart from the job and few opportunities to dance lead roles (R5, 1/2, L 673-681, 693) as this new company, AB, being larger is also more structured (R5, 1/2, L 707-708).

He still continues to remain in the company despite the obstacles as he still enjoys it, and “it is something really important to me in my life” and adds he does not feel like his body
is not “too old yet to kind of get up there and do it” (R5, 1/2, L 11-20). He foresees moving up the ranks of the company as “not really gonna happen for me” but he I still there to “kind of experience working with different choreographers …the different repertoire…and the opportunity to choreograph” and be able to express his own “creative ability” (R5, 1/3, L 39-50, 76). This opportunity to express his own creativity as a choreographer he sees as “a natural progression” and something that is “going to happen eventually” as he states he has “a lot to learn as a choreographer and that the essence of a gifted choreographer is more experience and time (R5, 2/2, L 909-910, 899-901).

Respondent 6 on the other hand speaks of his decision to leave his training at the RBS to dance with LFB (London Festival Ballet, now the English National Ballet) one that offers him experience “to dance…the Diaghilev repertoire…the works of Fokine, Lifar, Lichine…as well as Balanchine…a very good repertoire in terms of choreographic style” (R6, 1/3, L 841-853). He states one vital factor “to see the technique and …study the technique” of Balanchine as invaluable experience for his own choreography in the future (R5, 1/3, L 870-872). The discussion has similarities to that in Section 5.2.2.

5.4.5 To join another company

Only one respondent commented on this particular issue, his decision to join LFB was as he puts it turns “out to be one of the most awful experiences of my life” (R6, 1/3, L 140-141). He adds getting an offer of a contract from a professional dance company made him feel “enormously flattered” but he understands that the reason for the offer was “they were clearly short of male dancers” (R6, 1/3, L145-148). He realised, during the course of his time there, he did not have enough training and the treatment he encounters in the hands of the “management and by the other dancers of the company was almost Dickensian” (R6, 1/2, L 151-153). He stayed there for twenty months and then chose to return to Australia after that time.
5.4.6 To relocate away from home country

Four respondents commented on this issue. For Respondent 2, his feeling of
discontent and frustration while at SB, exacerbated by the lack of a promotion, makes him
seek and audition with a Canadian Dance company (R2, 1, L 421-423). The company, Les
Grand Ballet Canadien based in Montreal, offers him a soloist contract, he accepts the offer,
hands in his notice at SB, moves to Montreal, as he feels it is “an interesting situation” (R2, 1,
L 423-428). Interestingly enough after his time in Canada, he returns home to London with
the hope to resume his position at SB that was not to be, so he works freelance for a time, but
returns to the “financial security and… stability” of a full time position at the London City
Ballet (R2, 1/2, L 75-76, 99-100).

Respondent 4 admits his decision to move away from Australia to the United
Kingdom was an attempt “to go and measure ourselves against all the people in the mother
country” and “to go there prove to myself that I can do it” (R4, 1, L 663-664, 682-683). He
adds “to go to England” in a way was “to test ourselves” (R2, 1, L 689) and after a year at the
London Palladium he goes off to the Continent because of “all the cold winters” and the smog
in England at the time “was terrible” (R4, 1, L 700-701) and works in Lisbon, Stockholm,
Paris and Brussels. He spends another year or so, after that with the Sadler’s Wells Opera
Company before heading back to Australia (R4, 1, L 747-758).

Respondent 6, while at the Western Australian Ballet, applied and received a
fellowship/scholarship to study contemporary dance in NYC at the Cunningham Studios,
while enrolled as a student at the Julliard School (R6, 1/2, L 364-366, 378-381). To
supplement his scholarship he obtained work at the Australian Consulate in NYC, despite its
stability in terms of money (being paid public service rates) he saw his time there as “an
enormous trap” as he would have to abandon his dancing career “because it was not heading
anywhere” (R6, 1/2, L 496-497, 507, 515, 522-523). In February 1979, he returned to
Australia, after a bitter ending to a romance there (R6, 1/2, L 53-533, 558). He lived in both
London and NYC, and that time away strengthens his resolve to dance and choreograph, and also gave himself an understanding of “what I didn’t want to do” (R6, 1/3, L 1390-1391).

Respondent 7 moved away to South Africa after getting a dance contract. What he admits he gained there was “worldly experiencing, different cultures, meeting new people, living away from home…feeling familiarities…working up the ranks…and choreographing” (R7, 1/2, L 506-509, 522).

5.4.7 To do more academic study

Respondent 6, as previously discussed, won a scholarship to enrol at the Julliard School in NYC which allowed him to do dance classes there as a visiting student but more importantly to attend contemporary dance classes at the Merce Cunningham Studios (R6, 1/2, L 378-400). While he was studying in NYC he did classes with Hanya Holm whom he considers “a great pioneer of the German expressions in modern dance” who went onto choreograph My Fair Lady and Kiss me Kate and studies contemporary dance at the Cunningham Studio which was “a class a day basically” which is “what you did over six days” (R6, 1/2, L 388-392, 399-400).

Respondent 3 chooses another way to overcome his lack of selection as first cast in many productions, and as he states it, “I really started to develop other sides of my career…to look beyond ballet company life” and finds another way and enrolled in a Graduate Diploma in Arts and Entertainment Management at Deakin University in Melbourne (R3, 1/2, L 1485-1488, 1505-1509). This he saw as being adding value to what he was doing at the time – that of choreographing small works (R3, 1/2, L 1530-1534). He saw this move as a transition towards being “able to choreograph” and “continue to be creative and to work in the theatre” and eventually “to be able to direct” (R3, 1/2, L 1975-1978).

Respondent 2 went through an entirely different scenario as many of the other respondents interviewed. Upon his return from Montreal to London as discussed (in Section 5.6.5) he danced with LCB for a year and during this time he was also able to recreate some
of his works from his previous company, the SB (R2, 2/1, L 127-130). Immediately after his time with LCB he got an offer to choreograph a piece for the HKBG. While he created this piece in HK he decides “to move away from dancing” and to study “to become a teacher” and enrolled in the RAD (Royal Academy of Dance) teachers course (R2, 2/1, L 164-168, 182-183). He stayed on the course for one term and then leaves for HK to accept a twelve month contract as Acting Artistic Director of HKBC a position he worked in for eight months before he accepted a two year contract as Artistic Director of HKBC (R2, 2/1, L 186-190). He recalled this period in his life as the “most formative period of my life” (R2, 2/1, L 191-192). This began his career as an administrator (which is the subject of the next section).

After his two appointments as Artistic Director in two companies, in HK and South Africa, this respondent returned to London and enrolled and completed a Masters degree, as he was able to access funding from a resettlement fund he contributed to while he was a dancer (R2, 2/1, L 349-354). He did a Masters in Education at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, while he was employed as a Lecturer in Dance at Newcastle College (R2, 2/1, L 457-461). His decision to pursue a Masters degree was because he enjoyed academic life but more so a result of “realising my credentials were still lacking” (R2, 2/1, L 464). The other sections where similar discussions were undertaken were in 5.1.3, 5.1.4, 5.2.6, & 5.3.2.3.

5.4.8 To be a teacher or administrator

Respondent 2 accepted a position as Artistic Director which began his career as an administrator. This choice to be an administrator, for him, was valuable as he said “I made mistakes and I learnt from those mistakes…I was given the opportunity to do so, that made it valuable” (R2, 2/1, L 203-206). He made mistakes but he admitted he always “had the support of the Board who acted in many ways like a mentor for me” (R2, 2/1, L 209-211). He also admitted what was new for him then was “financial planning”, which was exacerbated by the fact that the company was funded by the Government and the feeling at the time was “the
funding was actually inadequate” (R2, 2/1, L 212, 228-229). This constant battle to attract funding from the Government took his toll on him, and he tries to direct “an exciting new company in one of the most exciting cities of the world” to become “a repository of twentieth century works” (R2, 2/1, L 253-255). This he achieved by putting aside his ambition into “a secondary position” as he put it “I simply couldn’t commit, neither the time nor the energy, to keep making works “(R2, 2/1, L 249-250).

When he decided to continue pursuing his ambition, after a time when he found he was stagnating in his own artistic development in HK he accepted another Artistic Director position with NAPAC in South Africa (R2, 2/1, L 258-268). Political instability and turmoil in South Africa ends his time there, and he returned to the UK after two years (R2, 2/1, L 303-304, 310-313). He followed up with teaching at Newcastle College as a Lecturer in dance, while pursuing a Master’s degree (as discussed in detail in section 5.4.7). The advent of Thatcherism in Britain at the time forced him to consider moving away, as a result of his strong political and philosophical convictions and his desire to maintain his same sex relationship with his Philippino partner (R2, 2/1, L 377-380, 494-496). His immigration lawyers suggest a move to New Zealand or Australia, as by this time, he was physically away from his partner for over three years (R2, 2/1, L 496-502). He was successful in his application with his partner to immigrate to New Zealand where they moved to and he accepted a teaching position at UNITEC as Head of the Contemporary Dance Programme (R2, 2/1, L 560-563). This position he stayed at for a year before accepting the position of Director at the NZSD, a position which allowed him to get back to his roots in Ballet (R2, 2/1, L 577-586). In doing all this he had at last retired from dancing per se, but not being involved with dance. (This discussion relates to the same respondent as in Section 5.4.7 above.)

Respondent 6, as discussed earlier in section 5.4.6, returned to Australia after his time in NYC learning contemporary dance (R6, 1/2, L 537-538). He returned to Australia for a position as contemporary dance teacher of the Cunningham technique at ABS in 1979, after
being a student there in 1968 (R6, 1/2, L 726, 728, 740-742). He was passionate about contemporary dance at the time, so teaching was not a problem at all as he saw it as “a very good technique, it sat well on a classically trained person” (R6, 1/2, L 749-751). He remained at the school for over 13 years, until a new Director is appointed (R6, 1/2, L 1180). At this time he was dismissed, which in later years becomes the basis of a suit for unfair dismissal, and the former employer settled out of court (R6, 1/2, L 1547-1549). Meanwhile, in 1994, he got a part time teaching appointment at the VCA (R6, 1/2, L 1271) which became a full time contract in 1998, an appointment he sees as being more prestigious as VCA is affiliated with The University of Melbourne (R6, 1/2, L 1528-1532). After much trial and tribulation he was once again a teacher of dance at VCA. He is now a retired dancer, but still involved in the dance world.

5.4.9 To retire from dancing

In the previous section, I show how Respondents 2 and 6 retire from dancing, with the former who becomes the Director of a dance school, while the latter is a dance teacher at the VCA (at the time of the interview). Only two other respondents at the time of interview had officially retired from dancing.

Respondent 1’s decision to retire was a direct result of the change of Artistic Directorship in the company he danced with as Principal dancer. His feeling of the new Director at the time was that “he couldn’t control us” and consequently he lost respect for him as a Director (R1, 2/1, L 956-958). This respondent’s decision to finally retire was because as he puts it “my dancing meant nothing basically…I wasn’t enjoying it anymore…it was frustrating working with the man, he made my dancing very displeasurable” (R1, 2/1, L 996-999). He decided to retire “rather than go back to Europe” as he was in a relationship at the time (R1, 2/1, L 990, 1003-1004). This decision to retire was also assisted by the fact that in the years leading up to that time, he started to see the limitations of his own body and had “nowhere to push my boundaries anymore”, so he feels a lack of focus (R1, 2/1, L 1098-
1106). Any opportunity to cross over into management did not materialise, so he decides to retire in favour of teaching dance (R1, 2/1, L 1149-1153, 1175, 1181-1182). He retires from dance in favour of teaching dance. (This is related to the discussion in Section 5.2.5.)

Respondent 4’s decision to retire related to his body “losing its flexibility, and its elasticity and I’d been performing since 1960…fifteen years of non stop dancing” and as he states “I knew my body was telling me…its time for you to retire” (R4, 1/2, L 1371-1376). For him, what was important was “I would love to settle down and have my own home and my own life” (R4, 1/2, L 1392-1393). Ultimately, it came down to “the wearing of the body, because it’s physical for all those years” (R4, 1/2, L 1407-1408). He chose not to teach dance but stays in the theatre by working as a cinema manager (R4, 1/2, L 1459) and then later finished with working at The Arts Centre. He too retired from dancing but is never far away from the theatre.

The next set of decisions to be discussed, transcend the linear time line categorisation used in the above previous sections as they do not relate to specific points in time, but are rather decisions made over the period of their lifetimes. It is for this reason, these decisions are considered separately.

5.4.10 Who to learn from

The issues I discuss here relate to decisions made by the respondents in terms of who they chose to learn from and what they choose to learn. Only two respondents make specific mention of these issues.

Respondent 2 made specific mention of who to learn from in terms of his dancing career. During his time at SB, his association with the Artistic Director was what he remembers most and he remembers him as “a guiding force throughout my life...he was a choreographer, and he founded the company” and becomes very “much a mentor” and role model for him (R2, 1, L 561-563). He recounted the Director’s greatest skill lay in his choreography as he was able to “draw together musicians, designers and painters” to “work in
a collaborative environment with each other” and to do this he “took enormous theatrical risks and he never forgot the value of entertainment” (R2, 1, L 566-571). This Director also believed in “the emotional value of dance” and was “not frightened to look at dance in a socio-political context” (R2, 1, L 576-579). He tried to “live up to those ideals” in his life (R2, 1, L 571-572). The choreographer George Balanchine, he says has been “one of the other greatest influences that I have” and this he relates to his understanding of “structure and choreography” in terms of the composition and structural elements in dance (R2, 1, L 597-598, 603-605). From Sir Kenneth MacMillan’s work he says he learns about emotion and emotiveness in dance (R2, 1, L 607-608).

Respondent 6 on the other hand speaks of his learning from the genre of musicals. He firmly believed and stated that “I think that anybody that needs to choreograph should do a musical at least once...you find out a lot” about the “audience, and pacing...as many of those musicals are masterpieces in terms of construction” (R6, 1/2, L 290-295). This is his personal beliefs about dance and choreography. (They also overlap with Sections 5.2.2, 5.2.3 & 5.3.2.3.)

In the next two sections, I will look at two more sets of decisions namely: to dance, and to continue to be a dancer, and to choreograph and be a choreographer. These decisions are inherently not ones that take place at a specific point in time but rather develop and mature over the course of their lifetimes.

5.4.11 To be a dancer

These decisions relate to the respondents passion for dance, to learn to dance, to be a dancer, and to also continue to be dancer. Respondent 2 talked about being in dance as “safe environment especially given the levels of fear that I had anticipated” given his sexual orientation as a gay man at that point in time (R2, 2/2, L 1427-1428). He also told the dance world where “there are so many gay men” makes it easier “for them to know they are coming out into a safe environment” (R2, 2/2, L 1457-1458). He also stated that to be in a
relationship with another dancer in the same company “is not always the best...because dance tends to be competitive, based upon a hierarchical structure which promotes the principal, highlights the soloist, and quite often doesn’t afford the corps de ballet a great deal, and if you’re in a same sex relationship...there are substantial tension between that too” (R2, 2/2, L 1482-1484). It is safe to say he never had a relationship with anyone in the same company. For him, to be in the same dance company with a same sex sexual partner is “very counterproductive” (R2, 2/2, L 1507). (This issue was raised in two previous sections 5.1.1.8 & 5.3.1.3.)

Respondent 3 told the results of his decision to be a dancer and his being a dancer. He felt a “sense of acceptance” of his life as a dancer, and as he puts it “my career was how it was” and it “was definitely fulfilling” but he feels that he “has plateaued” in his career (R3, 2/3, L 613-616). He also did not feel “a huge sense of satisfaction really in what I have achieved, but it also doesn’t sort of depress me either...I guess accepting is the best way” (R2, 2/3, L 617-619). In terms of his dancing career, he felt a little regret for not accepting the job he got offered with the Dutch National Ballet, as that was the “point where I felt like that was gonna be the next step, the next company to join in, and that would have been fantastic” (R2, 2/3, L 661-668).

For Respondent 4 to dance made him “feel accomplished” and was the “total satisfaction of my being” in that it was “the fulfilment of what I wanted to do” (R4, 1/1, L 53-57). The feeling he used to feel after a performance was that “of having accomplished something that you wanted to do, and you’ve given enjoyment to so many other people, that is of course, the audience” (R4, 1/1, L 58-60). His experiences with his first professional dance company, he likened to that of “a close knit compact company like a family” which is a far cry from the alternative employment he saw for himself coming from a small country town, that of “being a farmer on the farm” (R4, 1/1, L 48, 77-78). He chose to be a classical dancer and as he puts it “my forte was character dancing” as he “felt more at ease with
character roles” (R4, 1/1, L 9, 12, 36). For him “even in acting roles” there was character (R4, 2/1, L 150), and he enjoyed learning and knowing all the various character dances (R4, 2/1, L 157-159). Despite being a “movie fanatic” and as he puts it “I would love to have been an actor, I think that almost came before my desire to dance” but the decision to dance was as he puts it “an invisible desire...the pull” borne out of “sheer coincidence of moving to Melbourne” bringing out the “urge to perform” and “to dance” (R4, 2/2, L 18, 20, 23-28). This urge to perform was coupled with determination and single mindedness on his part too (R4, 2/2, L 81, 88-90).

His success with dance can be attributed to his physicality, he was athletic, “I was good at sport at school, I was a very good runner” (R4, 2/2, L 111-112) and his incredible drive and determination (R4, 2/2, L 65, 81). He remembered spending a lot of time practising the steps during daily (ballet) class (R4, 2/2, L 710-714) and he supplemented these technique classes by attending classes with other choreographers like Roland Petit (R4, 2/2, L 766-767). He also fondly remembered John Cranko who motivated him to do well and as he puts it “we all wanted to do well for John Cranko, we loved him” (R4, 2/2, L 810-811). To dance and be a dancer was truly his destiny (R4, 2/2, L 1004). This is consistent with the discussion in Section 5.1.2.

Respondent 5 recalled always enjoying dancing and he had the support of his family as well, so the choice to dance was not a difficult one to make (R5, 1/1, L 56-58). This interest in dance was enhanced by his involvement on musical theatre in High School, and was “encouraged to be a part of that by his school principal who was a nun (R5, 1/1, L 77-80). In dance, he found the biggest thing he enjoys most is “to strive for something...to see the improvement in yourself and to strive for perfection” (R5, 1/1, L 185-194). To dance also allowed him the opportunity to “express himself” and to choreograph means for him “expressing yourself through somebody else” (R5, 1/1, L 228, 243-244).
He made a conscious decision to get his Higher School Certificate, and after that he “could concentrate on his dancing career” as he realised even then that “you always have to have something to fall back on” (R5, 1/2, L 104, 112, 127-128). His early years in dance were fairly easy as he had family involved in the theatre, and for him “it was really starting up classes and being in that environment where I was encouraged by my teacher and the other people I danced with” so the decision to dance was trouble free indeed (R5, 2/1, L 11-13, 16-17). The decisions to be involved in dance sometimes came at a price for him, his other members of the family felt left out at times because “the dancers always came first” and that did raise some issues (R5, 2/1, L 161-163). During his time at ABS he began to develop a sexual identity, and this development of a sexual identity did not in any way hinder his development as a dancer, as there was there (in the school) “a lot of talented people and because there was that real element of competition which kind of pushes everyone forward” (R5, 2/1, L 624-626). For him, the attraction to the other dancers “is about the physical, physicality rather than the sexual” (R5, 2/1, L 648-650).

For this respondent the need to motivate himself was never an issue (R5, 2/1, L 800-802), but along the way, he did learn to rely on role models from the theatre and musicals and also from the principal dancers in the professional companies he danced with (R5, 2/1, L 856-859, 873-874). Learning from other people in the company he saw as a good thing because “you learn so much from the older dancers that are there...I think it was good thing to have that” (R5, 2/1, L 890-892). He also used mentors along the way, one was “his teacher in second year”, the Director of the QB, and some “choreographers who worked for the QB” a company he worked for at the time; who had “a big influence on his dance career (R5, 2/2, L 173-185, 232).

Respondent 6 returned to dance after not doing “terribly well” at University, so he goes back “at the age of eighteen...to study ballet” (R6, 1/1, L 25-26, 31), and this decision was more about looking for away to get back “into the theatre” (R5, 1/1, L 182). In his
decisions to be a dancer, he strived to “be the best in the world” and to be “one in a million” rather than be “one of a million” (R6, 1/1, L 364-376). He told of his time as a dancer, when he stated he felt “low self-esteem” as he puts it, he “was always insecure about the way I looked and how I was and what I danced, and wasn’t happy until I could stand back and look at what I had created, and I think that’s what you can’t do as a dancer” (R6, 1/1, L 852-854, 858). He was able to overcome this by becoming a contemporary dancer, and it was then he began to understand about “self-expression as a dancer” (R6, 1/1, L 909-910).

Respondent 6 also believed the dance world was supportive of gay men and he said it like this, “the people within it are supportive” and “it’s a very beautiful thing, and it has all those things that might appeal to a sensitive gay man” (R6, 2/1, L 208-217). He qualified the nature of that support offered as “acceptance and tolerance” by the people in it, which is a far cry from the generally accepted view that the “dominant culture” of the dance world is supportive of gay men (R6, 2/1, L 209, 224-225). His decision to turn to teaching dance he feels is a direct result of a number of different interacting variables: feeling that “academically I had been a bit of a failure, as a dancer I hadn’t achieved what I wanted to achieve...and because it was something that I had been thinking of for a long time” (R6, 2/2, L 896-898). He put it quite succinctly “I think I was starting to think that’s why I had done what I had done” because “my ambition was not actually to be a dancer, was to be a teacher and choreographer” (R6, 2/2, L 899-901).

Finally, Respondent 7 stated that for him to dance is to “feel more complete, more competent...feel more alive, more at home...all those ideas and feelings that I have within, that I express through my body and movement” (R7, 1/1, L 215-222), and dancing again after his accident he stated “was such a humble experience, because I found myself again, and I had found where I belonged” (R7, 1/1, L 226-227). It was a conscious decision for him to “change people’s perception of people with disabilities” and “expanding my own abilities...artistic, talents and creativity, to challenge the audience, and the general public’s perception of dance
and disability” (R7, 1/2, L 93, 104-108). When he started to dance at the age of seven, enjoying dance was based on the physical, so he just kept going on, and the sexual enjoyment in dance “was just how it turned out”, and later in life, I “felt more accepted in the dance world” (R7, 1/2, L 415-417).

For Respondent 7, learning to dance again after his accident involved his relearning and re-adjusting to “things I did not like about my body, by being more expressive in my upper body...and presenting my work more so with my upper body” as he was now a quadriplegic (R7, 1/3, L 1224-1226). He saw this new perception as his “physically capable of exploring movement more” and exploring the full range of movement (R7, 1/3, L 1350-1353), with a physicality that involved “not standing on two legs...exploring the physicality as a person that’s not upright” which he finds equally “as exciting...creating a whole lot of different shapes and dynamics” (R7, 1/3, L 1423-1429, 1440, 1445-1447). I should not underestimate the value of this new perception as he was a person who had “natural movement”, and was “doing gymnastics” and was doing “back flips” as far back as primary school (R7, 2/1, L 14-15, 20-22). For him to dance and be in the dance world helped support his growing sexuality and awareness, as in dance you become like a “family, because you are so close...you spend so much time in the studio” and “you live and breathe it with these people, so its hard not to build those bonds and those relationships, and those closeness” (R7, 2/1, L 138-143). He told of his own personal experience, where he finds “it hard...not to be attracted to anyone else but dancers” (R7, 2/1, L 293-295) and having “a partner in the dance world becomes easy because they understand the world” of dance, the commitment and the sacrifices (R7, 2/1, L 382-387).

Right from his time at VCASS and ABS, this respondent was aware of “his passion” for dance, that he “loved it deep down” and when that “when I was on stage I was comfortable” (R7, 2/2, L 293-297). But he saw his current situation as a differently abled dancer had forced him to be more extrovert” and that “to get people to understand, you’ve
got to educate them...and that’s part of my work now, through my dance, through my everyday being, I’m education people” (R7, 2/2, L 343-345). An admirable ambition it is nonetheless. (These issues were also highlighted in the discussion in Sections 5.2.1 to 5.2.3 & 5.2.6 to 5.2.7.)

5.4.12 To be a choreographer

These decisions related to the respondents’ early interests and passion to choreograph, to learn how to choreograph, to be a choreographer, and to also continue to be choreographer. Respondent 2 started choreographing early in his dance career at SB, as a corps de ballet in fact (R2, 1, L 392-394) and he enjoyed this immensely as he puts it “didn’t have pressure imposed upon me that I was a choreographer...this is a hobby and it’s not the be all and end all of my life” (R2, 1, L 622-626). At that point in time, for his choreography, he “borrowed massive influences from all the people that I admired...John Neumeier, Kenneth MacMillan and Maurice Bejart” (R2, 1, L 633-636). His foray into choreography also led him into Artistic Direction, as his accepting an offer “to go and create a work” for the HKBG led to an Assistant Director position at HKB and then later, an Artistic Directorship with the same Ballet Company (R2, 1, L 148-153, 176-178, 188-190). His decision to do a piece of choreography helped to shape his future career.

Respondent 3 tells that as a choreographer, at the time of this interview, he found it hard to feel fulfilled as a choreographer as he tells it “I’ve just started with the choreography” and that “it’s really only the beginning” and “when I think back, the fact that I wasn’t even planning ever to do any” (R3, 2/3, L 644-653). He said “I want to keep choreographing” and “I’d like to direct a company” but he acknowledges “I don’t think it’s gonna happen locally, there just isn’t the opportunities...I’m drawn back to Europe...there’s more opportunities there” (R3, 2/3, L 689-694). That was where he saw his future.

Respondent 5 told of having ideas about choreography from a young age and as he puts it “I’ve always really enjoyed watching other dancers and I find it really inspiring
watching other dancers, and watching performances...just because there’s so many great”
dancers and artists (R5, 1/2, L 1106-1113). He was learning a lot about choreography from
his experiences, especially about improvisation, and how to use it as his process of choice
(R5, 1/2, L 1158-1167). His choreographic commission with the Singapore Dance Theatre
gave him confidence about his ability, first it was “the final two being selected” (R5, 1/2,
L 1273) and relied on the use of videos of rehearsals to assist his process of choreographing
(R5, 1/2, L 1310-1315). He added further that his creative process began with visual images,
and then he gets more inspiration from the dancers improvisations, the combination of shapes
and forms, and that his how it evolves (R5, 1/3, L 264-266, 292-293, 295-300).

He saw the reality of choreographing a dance piece using a gay theme would see the
company having the difficulty of how to “sell that piece”, as it would, he says “sell tickets in a
certain market...but not to the general public” (R5, 1/3, L 1096-1110). This did not deter his
choreographing, as his past experiences have given him the confidence “to make the first step
towards looking... for opportunities to choreograph” (R5, 2/1, L 110-114).

Respondent 6 told of wanting to continue to choreograph as being “compulsion, a
compulsion, something that one loves...and responding to music that I love” (R6, 1/3, L 10-14), involving “some degree of physicality, that you have to feel a lot of the movement
through your own body, particularly if you’re going to improvise to get ideas” (R6, 1/3, L 22-25) because choreography after all is about “expression, self expression...and how can you
call it something else” (R6, 1/3, L 37-39). For him, his process of choreography involves the
use “of mental images” and “it’s gotta be more than just steps” and he finds it suits him best
to begin with the “music” (R6, 1/3, L 92-93, 107-108). This respondent’s decision to
choreograph was characterised and enhanced by his realisation “that I was good at something”
as he felt “a bit of a failure” at everything else he did (R6, 2/2, L 894-898).

For Respondent 7 the decision to choreograph was intrinsically linked to his “way of
expressing himself” which enables him to express himself and make him feel “complete,
competent” and accomplished based around what he sees as “the natural ability that I had” (R7, 1/1, L 173-179, 210). He still wanted to choreograph and would “jump at any opportunity to choreograph because it is really on the same level as my dancing” and saw it “as the basis of what I want to be able to do” which is “to grow...as an artist and develop” (R7, 2/2, L 35-36, 44-49). But despite all these challenges, he planned to go to London to work with a differently abled dance company to be “earning a salary and doing what I want to be doing, I can then develop other work...to then come back and choreograph work” (R7, 2/2, L 73-76). The discussions in previous sections that have intersected with the discussion above are: Sections 5.2.4, 5.2.7, 5.3.1.6 and 5.3.2.2.

5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I analysed and discussed the problems the respondents experienced during the course their individual lifetimes. Some of these problems correspond to, or are similar to, the critical incidents analysed in Chapter 4. It is hardly surprising that for some, these critical incidents were viewed as major problems that have critical effects and consequences. These problems were categorised as emotional and familial, physical, psychosexual, socio-political and professional, and were covered in Sections 5.1 to 5.2.

The problems experienced by the (individual) respondents also resulted in their having to make many decisions to resolve those problems. However, in making those decisions they would have relied on skills they acquired over the course of the individual lifetimes. In this next section, the categories I used to analyse were those skills that are innate to the person and those that they had acquired.

In the final sections, I analysed the different types of decisions that were made by these respondents over time spanning their careers. I started by looking at those issue that were time and profession related: prior to their attending dance school, while they were training at dance schools, while dancing with professional companies, their choice to move to other professional companies, to relocate from their home country, to do more academic
study, to be a teacher and administrator and finally to retire from dance. I closed this section by assessing those issues which transcend this linear time related categorisation, and these were: who they chose to learn from, their desire to be a dancer and finally, their desire to be a choreographer.
If we can just hold our own, one day we will triumph – even if we aren’t then among those who are widely spoken of.

Vincent Van Gogh, 1888

CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION

The aim of this chapter is to build upon and extend the information presented in the results chapters four and five. This purpose of the chapter is to use the information obtained to create knowledge about what and how male dancer/choreographers negotiated the course of their lives through the different life cycle stages. This chapter serves to draw links between the ideas and concepts obtained from the literature reviewed, to the results obtained from the personal interviews.

The major purpose of this study was to determine what events, deemed and perceived as being critical, had an impact on the lives of these seven dancer/choreographers as they negotiated the life cycle stages of development in their lives. These issues were the prime consideration when I developed the primary research question.

To assess and determine the nature of the impact, I looked at three distinct areas of concern for my research. First, the problems they encountered as they negotiated their lives as dancer/choreographers. Next, the decisions they had to make as a direct or indirect consequence of their experiencing these problems. Finally, I looked at the requisite skills they possessed, amassed, and used to resolve these problems. It is these three concerns that I fashioned into as the secondary research questions (also set out in chapter one).

Embedded within the structure of these research questions, I overlaid the context and structure of Earl’s (1988) idea of life cycle stage development of male dancers, Peacock’s (2000) study of gay male adult development, Savin-Williams’ (1998) research on adolescent males, and Siegel and Lowe’s (1995) study of gay men. These studies were all undertaken in the USA. I constructed the research questions within the context of how and when these dancers progressed through the different life cycle stages of their own development. In doing this, I fashioned the list of questions with Earl’s (1988) different stages of development as the
base, and incorporated salient features from the other works, and asked the respondents how they negotiated the stages of their lives, to determine if there were any elements of similarity or otherwise from each other, and those characterising the USA experience. By doing this, I am extending the research undertaken in the USA, and applying it to the socio-cultural and socio-political context of Australia and New Zealand.

An added feature of my research is the fact that only male dancer/choreographers were interviewed. In this research study I was able to interview seven male dancer/choreographers, all of whom self-identify themselves as non-heterosexual (gay, bisexual, asexual, and sexually ambivalent) men in terms of their sexuality and sexual identity.

6.1 THE SAMPLE

I begin this discussion by reviewing the sample of respondents used for this research study. I interviewed seven male dancer/choreographers from Australia and New Zealand. I specifically chose to interview male dancer/choreographers only, as the focus of my research is non-heterosexual males. The choice of focussing on Australia and New Zealand was purely one of having access to people in these two countries. In the end, I interviewed two respondents from New Zealand with the other five respondents from Melbourne. Of the five respondents domiciled in Melbourne, one was originally from New Zealand but came here in his early teens to study at a dance school in Melbourne, and has since remained in Australia.

6.1.1 Sexuality and sexual identity

The issue I will consider next is the nature of the respondent’s sexuality and sexual identity. Of the seven respondents, five self identified as being gay, and were living openly as gay men. Of the five who self identified as being gay men, three were in same sex relationships, and were at the time living with their male partners. Of these three, only one admitted to having a girlfriend while he was a student at the Royal Ballet School in London. One of them also admitted that it was in the pursuit of this same sex relationship that led him
to leave South Africa, return to London, and subsequently to immigrate to New Zealand to enable them to live together as a couple. That relationship did not last, and at the time of the interview, this respondent was single. All three men in this group admitted to having relationships with other dancers, and also stated the degree of difficulty that added to their relationship.

One of the other respondents I will have to classify as being asexual, for the prime reason that he makes no mention of any relationships that he has had, either through my interviews or through the pages of his own autobiography. Any attempt I made to raise the issue or to get him to discuss the issue of sexuality was met with his saying that it was never an issue for him at all in his life. I surmised that due to his age, he placed a high price on his privacy, and it is not the sort of thing he was prepared to discuss with a relative stranger like myself. He did allude to the attractiveness of certain male dancers he had seen, but would not classify himself sexually. He expressed no sexual attraction for any female or female dancers for that matter. He offered one comment, that he saw the other dancers in the companies he danced for as his family, and hence no sexual attraction or connotation would or could be evident as a result, at least from his point of view. Subsequently, during the course of time I spent with him, it is my firm belief that his categorisation as being asexual would probably be the most appropriate.

The final respondent I perceived as being sexually ambivalent. After a careful and in-depth discussion with him about his sexuality and sexual identity, he explained that since his car accident he found it really hard to see and perceive him as a sexual person/being. Further discussion about his life in the past, resulted in some interesting insights. He had in the past been involved with other men, but the other men were not dancers. That fact he felt made their relationship a little more balanced. Suffice to say that since his accident (three years ago), sex, sexuality, and sexual identity were not issues he had considered, as he felt sexually ambivalent.
Most of the respondents (five out of seven) in the sample self-identified as being gay men, with one being sexually ambivalent, and one other being asexual. Hence, I use the term non-heterosexual men in this study to distinguish them from the culturally acceptable norm of being heterosexual men. This in and of itself I believe makes this sample worthy of research.

6.2 LIMITATIONS

The main emphasis of this study was not to focus on heterosexual men per se. This was done for a number of specific reasons. To begin with, in the world of dance, I had direct access to many male dancer/choreographers through my involvement and participation in dance (as a student, and as a member of an audience), many of whom were also gay men. I also chose to study non-heterosexual men particularly, because being male and gay myself, I found it was of greater interest to me personally and professionally as a researcher in dance and in the performing arts. Earl (1988) in his study cites the fact that there was no real study undertaken at that time of male dancer choreographers, so this was a strong impetus for this research study.

I must emphasize the use of the term dancer/choreographer. It is obvious that many dancers participate in choreography at different times of their lives and careers. Equally so, many choreographers also participate in their own choreographic works as dancers. To identify them as either being one or the other, as dancers or choreographers, is not a useful distinction. In my opinion, to be a really successful choreographer, a person must have spent some time as a dancer first in order to appreciate and understand the subtle nuances evident in dancing, in the construction of dance, and in the performance of dance.

These two issues discussed above are not in themselves necessarily limitations of this study, but set the location or contextualisation of the study in terms of its focus and purpose, hence making it easier to identify the limitations of study, which will be addressed below.

To begin with, there was some doubt as to the validity of the number of respondents used in this study. At first sight, seven respondents appear to be a relatively small sample, but
this is not a quantitative study and I am not trying to make generalisations about the population of male dancer/choreographers. Furthermore, the degree of time spent and involvement (sometimes referred to as prolonged engagement) with the respondents will help to alleviate some of these concerns. In total, the number of interviews for each respondent numbered five and were conducted on five separate occasions (times and days), and only in two cases were the interviews conducted in less than five different days. These two cases occurred with the respondents in New Zealand, where I did not have the time to space out the interviews over different days. All in all, I conducted five interviews with each respondent, and two hours per interview, I managed to amass a large volume of qualitative data about the respondent’s individual lives. In the end, about thirty five audio tapes, each of about a two hour duration had to be transcribed verbatim to form the data for this study.

I would have liked to interview more people in New Zealand. I had originally planned to interview two more respondents, but as a result of their choreographic commitments and various illnesses, this was not possible. These two respondents had to withdraw from the study. It would also have been useful to have obtained a more geographical spread of the people interviewed. Dance audiences in New Zealand are small at best given the size of the population. Many dancers would in the end have to leave the country to find work and experience with companies abroad. In New Zealand, the respondents interviewed were from Wellington and Nelson. I could have sourced respondents from Auckland and Christchurch, where other major dance companies do exist, but my attempts at obtaining access did not eventuate.

In Australia, all of the respondents were from Melbourne. It would have been good to be able to interview others from Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth, where major dance companies do abound. I was unable to get access to many of the individuals there, and with those that I established contact with, their performance and touring schedules made it next to impossible to schedule interviews. In the end, I had to keep my respondents to those in
Melbourne, given the limited resources I had access to finance, and the access to these
different people proved to be tricky and next to impossible.

In terms of the dancing itself, there are a number of issues worth considering at this
juncture. In the end, I was able to access dancers that comprised positions as *corps de ballet*
all the way to Senior Artists and Principal dancers. But, this career path only applies to ballet
companies and not to any other modern or contemporary dance companies. Most companies
that form the latter group tend not to have a strong hierarchical structure with their company
of dancers. Some will have Principal dancers or Soloists and other dancers, whilst others
have no hierarchy at all. To this end, I would have liked to have interviewed more
dancer/choreographers from modern or contemporary dance companies.

Most of the respondents interviewed favoured the classical genre, although many did
have their feet planted in both the classical and contemporary genres when it came to their
choreography. It would have been useful and insightful to have interviewed someone else
who was fully committed to the contemporary technique alone.

Finally, I would have liked to have had a sample of people whose ages ranged from
their early 20s to their late 50s, with at least two respondents from each of the age groups,
20s, 30s, 40s and 50s. That would have been the ideal situation, but as in most research
studies, it is difficult to choose your sample of respondents. As it worked out in this study,
the respondent’s ages ranged from 26 to 72. The respondent in his 70s ended up being the
most interesting person to interview by the sheer nature of his age and experience. The
youngest member in the group of respondents also proved to be an interesting person to
interview, by virtue of his being a differently abled dancer who dances with his chair, and also
choreographs.
6.3 THE EMERGING THEORY

In the analysis of the critical incidents, the problems, the decisions and the skills used to arrive at these decisions, a number of recurring themes appear. It is the discussion of these recurring themes which forms the focus of this section in the chapter. It is the analyses of these themes which pave the way for the formation of some emerging theory about the lives of male dancer/choreographers. To derive this emerging theory, I made reference to studies considered previously in the literature review to this study. I considered what the literature informs us about male dancer and choreographers and as a consequence what I expect to find from this study. The findings and results obtained from this study validate these expectations or otherwise. By undertaking this procedure I am aiming to show if previous literature findings are validated, if not, what theory emerges (and what form this theory takes) from the results I have obtained.

I began the analysis by looking at themes, independent, or recurring. These were further broken down into constituent factors. The recurring themes and their constituent factors that resulted after an analysis of the data can be classified under two distinct groups. I chose to classify the first group of themes as constituting elements/factors that are innate or intrinsic to the individual. These themes revolve around the factors of family and familial influences, sexuality and sexual identity, physiognomy and physicality (relating to the physical body) and the emotional well-being of the individuals (refer to Figure 1).

The next set of themes and constituent factors I chose to classify as constituting elements that external or extrinsic as they are external to the individual themselves and are brought to bear upon them as they interact with the external environment. This explains why these themes are represented as circumscribing the intrinsic factors. These factors range from their dance training, to their dancing and choreographic career challenges, the socio-cultural impact of the environment and finally, to the issues relating to their retirement from dance (refer to Figure 2).
I identified the inter-relationships between all of the different factors. I also focus on the strength of the relationship between the themes representing the intrinsic and extrinsic factors (refer to Figure 3).

I begin this discussion with an analysis of the socio-cultural context within which this study has been undertaken. This contextualisation provides a form of positioning of the study. Hofstede, at al. (1998) identifies Australia and New Zealand, like USA, as having cultures which are predominantly masculine (p. 81) and this fact will have a direct impact on how these societies view sexual behaviour of the two sexes. Sexual behaviour is “culturally constructed” (Hofstede, at al., 1998, p. 153) and hence, society will determine what characterises gender specific behaviour for that national culture (p. 46).

In masculine cultures state Hofstede, et al. (1998), like Australia and New Zealand, society values and emphasizes “material success” (p. 17) and “assertiveness” (p. 84). More importantly, add Hofstede, at al. (1998) sexuality is “culturally constructed” (p. 154), so it is expected that people from masculine cultures are less “open about discussing sexual issues” (p. 153) and will “manifest a strong taboo on addressing any sexual issues openly” (p. 157). These cultures are more conservative and therefore homophobic, because homosexuality (or any form apart from heterosexuality) is “perceived as a threat” (Hofstede, et al., 1998, p. 175). Given this socio-cultural context, it is obvious that non-heterosexual men will have “more problems accepting their sexual orientation” (p. 167), have “more resistances to overcome” (p. 167), and will ultimately end up “being more conservative in their outlook” (p. 167). In addition, in the Australian context specifically, homosexual men will tend to identify more than other men with a feminine role. This is the context in which this study is set.
6.3.1 The Innate (Intrinsic) Factors

The main core (intrinsic) constituent factors affecting and impacting the individuals are classified here as being familial, physical, sexual and emotional (see figure 1). I considered including two other factors namely, psycho-sexual and socio-cultural/political, but decided against them. These two factors would eventually result in emotional consequences and responses, so I chose to discuss them as being derivative and consequentially related to the theme classified as emotional.

Figure 1

Themes – Innate Factors
6.3.1.1 Familial

This factor is classified as ‘familial’ as it represents all things related to the family and its many influences. It encompasses the family religion, the domicile of the family, the family and home environment, parental feelings for the respondent, parental assistance (physical and emotional) provided for them to pursue dance, and the consequent deaths of the parents. As such it is an all encompassing category. This factor also had a strong influence on the degree of emotional stability or otherwise experience by the respondents. A majority of the literature reviewed informs us to expect these issues (mentioned above) in the life cycle stage development of male dancers.

Earl (1988) identify that at the symbiotic stage of a dancer’s development, there is strong debate between whether “nature or nurture” has the greatest influence on the forming of a person’s personality as an element of their identity (p. 4). Strong evidence for both schools of thought is available. For the respondents I interviewed, the effects of the family had a strong nurturing component. Siegel and Lowe (1995) state the turning points in the life of the respondents he interviewed varied between the respondents differing religion, class and culture (as exemplified by the respondents) but they tend to arrive at the same intellectual, emotional, and spiritual destination by different routes. While this may be true for their sample, but the sample of people I used were people of similar Christian religions, within the same class structure and similar masculine cultures (Hofstede, at al., 1998). Finally, Savin-Williams (1998) informs us that “family values and institutional heterosexism” have a way of handicapping their understanding of same sex attraction (p. 136). This was validated by my study as many of the respondents mentioned the influence of their family and the impact it had on their lives.

In addition, Hamilton (1999) states that for many of her interviewees telling their family about their homosexuality was a “stumbling block” or hurdle they had to overcome (p. 2), and some of them (in the USA) feared their “families would shun them” if they knew
which directly validates the emotional and psychological impact their families had on their lives. It is hardly surprising as a result to find that the respondents viewed family and familial influence and pressure as being critical and having a tremendous impact on their development as individuals and on their future lives.

6.3.1.2 Physical

I chose to incorporate under the heading of physical all issues relating to the body, from their physique and body shape that one is born with as a direct result of our parents genes, to the physicality one exhibits from youthful sport to later dance training and to the issue of physiognomy as one respondent became wheel chair bound. I am fully aware that the selection of all dancers is based on an assessment of their physical ability, their turnout and the point in their feet, the strength in their legs, and their body shape and structure (Golovkina, 1985, p.12; The Australian Ballet, 2007, section 3d; The Royal Ballet School, n.d., section 2a). The belief is that everything else can be taught rigorously and learned through strict discipline.

Some elements of physicality are inherited from our family’s genes. Some are either born with it or without it, and this is the element of nature as advocated by Earl (1988) in the symbiotic stage. A dancer relies solely on their body, so an issue allied to it would be that of injury and as was the case for one respondent, the loss of his physicality resulting in his dancing with and in his wheelchair.

For a professional dancer injury means not being able to dance, and someone else having to cover for them whilst in a professional company. This has a significant impact on the renewal of their contracts. Injuries as a student on the other hand, means being away from classes and studies, thus having an impact on their graduation and their being able to audition for dance companies. One respondent proved that his lack of physicality and movement was no hindrance whatsoever in his ability to dance. This respondent showed everyone that there is a new paradigm to dance, and that it is possible to still be aesthetically valid as a dancer.
while dancing in and with a wheelchair. This respondent also proved this to me when he showed me a video of his choreography which involved elements of an aerial ballet where he was in a harness while he swung around a room.

6.3.1.3 Sexual

The next factor, although termed as sexual, refers to a varied range of issues. This term encompasses issues like gender, which is a function of one’s sex, which in turn is sociologically and psychologically constructed (Burt, 1994; Burt, 1995; Connell, 2000; Edgar, 1998; McAvoy, 2002) to that of sexual identity and sexuality (Bailey & Oberschneider, 1997; Hamilton, 1999; Savin-Williams, 1998). The range of issues considered here covers a large portion of the respondents’ years of growing up. The difficulty involved for many of the respondents was that, during the course of their development into adulthood, they had to negotiate their way towards developing an individual identity, but at the same time had to come to terms with their emerging sexual identity. This issue will be considered again when discussing the emotional variable in the next section.

Earl (1988) cites the other two stages of life cycle development, ego centric and socio-centric stages as having a very strong and direct effect on male ballet dancers in terms of their expressing their self and sexual identity. For many of the respondents in this research, during the course of developing their self identity as male (gender related) and negotiating their sexual identity (as being non-heterosexual) they experienced feelings of isolation and being apart (Peacock, 2000; Siegel & Lowe, 1994; Savin-Williams, 1998; Tacey, 1997), embarrassed as a result of feeling different from their family and the males around them, and finally to follow their heart to be non-heterosexual.

For one respondent, he experienced as sense of being isolated from his Irish roots. For another respondent, he felt a sense of being apart as he was always closer to girls at his school and not with the boys who would separate themselves from him. Yet another respondent felt that he was responsible for the rift between his parents, as his mother left the country with
him to allow him to attend dance school. For the final respondent I interviewed, this period of his life was marked by a distinct sense of loss, as being an only child; he was sent away to attend boarding school at VCASS, and that was the first time he had ever left home at all. Being embarrassed and different was also felt by a few but for one respondent particularly, it was the wearing of tights, for another it was his rural school experience, and finally one respondent made an insightful statement that dancing for him was embarrassing and not very rewarding at all, in hindsight.

In terms of sexual identity, the issue of coming out is of vital importance towards accepting and acknowledging oneself. One respondent admits that moving to London allowed him the freedom to be a gay man. While another admits to coming out to his family early in his career as he did not want anything to come between them. Another felt that the dance community was supportive of gay men so coming out was not such a painful process for him, as he felt supported.

In searching for potential partners, and living as gay men, one respondent expressed the fact he found it hard not to be attracted to other dancers given the sheer physical nature of dancing as a profession. Two other respondents followed their heart and relocated to New Zealand and Europe to be with someone they loved or had a romance with. For both of these individuals this meant leaving the comforts of their home country to relocate to another country in an attempt to establish a partnership and/or relationship with their same sex partner at the time. One other respondent pursued a number of different relationships with people outside the city they lived in. In his case, the situation became totally untenable, forcing him to relocate at a later date to be with his partner at the time. Suffice to say many of these men had to make sacrifices to pursue their sexual identity and sexuality, and the consequences that resulted from them.
6.3.1.4 Emotional

This final factor relates to the emotional well being of the individuals. As mentioned earlier in this section, the psycho-sexual and socio-political factors do feature heavily as the consequence of these issues resulted in emotional upsets and problems for the respondents interviewed. In addition their families also have a strong impact on their emotional development; as it is part of the nurturing environment in which they would have grown up. Two keys elements in this issue have strong emotional impacts. For some, parental support made all the difference in their accepting a dance career. On the other hand, if parents, especially fathers, express their discontent and/or displeasure at their sons doing dance, the emotional impact felt was even stronger and hence their effects were longer lasting. For one respondent in particular, the death of his father left many unresolved issues for him. The subsequent suicide of his mother a number of years later left him bereft as he was particularly close to his mother for so many years. She had moved with him to Melbourne so he could attend VCA and ABS. The death of any parent leaves a strong indelible mark on the person, but the deaths of both parents make a bigger impression to heighten this sense of loss.

The psycho-sexual factors also have a strong emotional impact on the lives of many of the respondents. For one respondent, accepting a gay identity meant keeping his personal life separate from his professional life. For those raised in the Christian traditions, this meant that they had to learn to accept that they were not perceived as normal. For others, being gay meant being perceived as not being masculine and even their coming to terms with their emotional side was often perceived as a feminine quality/trait. For male ballet dancers especially, their dance training required them to learn how to exhibit masculine traits, and for some this can be incongruent and incognisant with coming to terms with their own developing sexuality. Bear in mind all this seems to happen and occur at a time when most young men are still coming to terms with their own maturity and sense of self, and trying to navigate
through the maze of sexual orientation and sexual identity. It is without doubt a confusing
time, coupled with a high degree of emotion.

On a more personal level, I found that a number of factors remain individual and felt
unable to categorise appropriately into any of the main categories discussed here. They are
worthy of discussion nonetheless, as they do have an impact on the respondents emotional
development and well being throughout their careers. One respondent reports having to
obtain permission from his school principal before he was allowed to attend dance classes, but
she flatly refused him. This reliance on someone else appeared again when he was in a dance
company and was always being overlooked for parts in casting decisions. This reliance on
casting decisions will affect and have an impact on every dancer in a professional dance
company, and have very strong emotional consequences, and may even result in their seeking
opportunities with other dance companies (which was the case for at least three respondents
interviewed).

The love of dance expressed by all the respondents came with emotional costs and
consequences. Some chose to hide the fact they were taking dance classes, others were
subject to name calling at school, to being teased, and even being bullied by boys at their
school. For many, the choice to dance was a risky choice at the time. Risk taking is also a
feature identified by those who chose to choreograph. The act of choreographing implies
performing their own piece of work which is then subject to criticism by others. Being able to
learn from others by accepting their criticism is another feature which has a strong emotional
component. A choreographer opens himself to reveal his inner self in his choreography, and
to be criticised for doing so is extremely challenging and confronting indeed. Socio-
cultural/political factors also have an emotional impact for some, but that element will be
considered below, in the next set of factors.
6.3.2 The Extrinsic (External) Factors

The next theme and constituent factors I chose to call extrinsic or external to the individual. In figure 2, I have drawn these factors as circumscribing the innate or intrinsic factors. These extrinsic factors are the socio-cultural factors, their dance training, the challenges (choreographic commissions, awards and scholarships) they were offered and afforded, and finally their reasons for retiring from dance.

These factors were placed in their relative positions for a specific and distinct reason. To begin with, the socio-political factors were placed beside the sexual variable because for one particular respondent they were inter-related. Dance training was juxtaposed between the intrinsic familial and physical themes, and also having a direct influence over their dancing career and challenges. These factors are inherently linked. Decisions to retire also have a link to the physical, the emotional, and the career challenges (or the lack of it) available towards the end of one’s dancing career.
6.3.2.1 Socio-cultural/political

The socio-political factor was considered vital by one respondent, and in fact this issue appears as a critical incident, and then as a problem to overcome, which resulted in his having to make a number of life changing decisions. It is this fact alone, which made me include this feature in the model. The factor involved the changing global arena at the time of the respondents career, which took him from China to South Africa, and then back to UK and finally to New Zealand. This factor also had a strong emotional content as it involved him having to fight social bias/norms and prejudice to pursue his love of dance and the pursuit of a relationship. He had already negotiated his life towards the acceptance of a gay sexual
identity, but for him to be able to pursue this identity and engage in a same sex partnership created a large number of obstacles and hardships which he had to overcome and at times to endure. We are all aware of the sexual revolution in the 1960s and its impact on a generation of people, but for many disadvantaged, social and sexual minority groups (like homosexual men) the sexual revolution of the 1960s did not bring any change or advantages. For many of the younger respondents in my study, growing up in Australia isolated them from the effects of racism and apartheid. For the older members of the group studied in Australia, they were never forced to directly confront these issues on any level in their lives.

For one respondent, becoming the Artistic Director of HKBC at a time when Hong Kong was going to be handed back to China was problematic. The conflicts and confrontation at Tiananmen Square in China, also featured heavily (at the time) which caused this respondent to make a decision based on his conscience and his sense of morality. Fortunately, an opportunity arose for him and he chose to go to South Africa’s NAPAC Dance Company’s as Artistic Director, where he was forced to confront the issue of apartheid resulting him giving up his position in favour of a Black African. This was again a decision based on conscience.

After that, he had no choice but to return home to the UK, to a political climate dominated by Thatcherism. Margaret Thatcher’s government was highly conservative and the effect of Clause 28 meant that homosexuals were afforded little rights and recognition by the Government, let alone same sex couples. This respondent felt he had only one choice, to turn his back on his own country and to relocate to New Zealand, in protest and disgust at the way his country was treating him as a gay male. Many of the respondents would have had to make difficult choices as a result of the socio-cultural/political circumstances facing gay people, but none of the others had to make so many critical life altering decisions. Through this description alone, no one can escape or not notice the emotional impact these decisions had on this particular individual.
A final social-cultural element considered in my literature review is that of gay men involved in the creative endeavours tend to create their own sense of family separate and distinct from their genetic family. Siegel and Lowe (1995) and Leddick (2000) all chronicle how gay men in the arts tend to create a sense of family incorporating “lovers, ex-lovers, friends and children” (pp. 4). This feature was not mentioned in any form by the respondents I interviewed. They may have established their own sense of family, but was not deemed critical in terms of their life cycle stage development.

6.3.2.2 Dance Training

Fisher (2007) states “men who do ballet are brave or foolhardy”, as the “art form is related to the feminine gender and any male who undertakes this training will be subject to abuse” (p. 1). On the whole, we know this to be true for many male dancers. Ted Shawn and his company of male dancers tried hard to make dance more palatable and hence more acceptable to a western audience by making it more macho in an attempt “to break the stereotype” that dance is feminine (Fisher, 2007, pp. 2-3). Another stereotype many would have had to deal with by dancing is that “all dancers are gay” (Fisher, 2007, p. 8) despite Bailey and Oberschneider’s study showing only one male believed that his experience in dance influenced his sexual orientation (1997, p. 5).

A number of respondents started dancing early in life, with the “average age of male dancers” in the USA at age 13 (Hamilton, 1999, p. 2). Out of the seven interviewed, only two from the Australian sample began dancing in their late teens, which is consistent with the results from the USA. Some of the respondents started with social dancing, jazz, tap or even gymnastics before taking up formal classical technique classes. Most of the respondents identified that they led active physical lives as children, and that the progression into dance for some was by chance or a means employed by their parents to keep them engaged. Undertaking classes because their sisters or other female relatives were doing them, and they followed to try it out were other common responses to beginning to dance.
I specifically asked all the respondents if they could remember how it felt to be in their first dance class. One respondent who started ballet classes much later in life remembers quite vividly how silly he felt in the tights and shoes and recalled feeling a little backward as everyone else already had a working knowledge of the ballet positions and the French terminology used to refer to these ballet positions and movements. Others recall how lucky or fortunate they were to be selected for entry to prestigious dance schools with what they considered to be relative ease.

Formal dance training at dance schools for many of the respondents involved leaving home and their family to relocate to larger cities to attend prestigious dance schools. The emotional experience and effect of such a move was discussed in an earlier section (6.3.1.4). For many, the choice to dance was a personal choice, but many accepted the emotional and personal costs involved.

Apart from being away from the family home, many of the respondents distinctly remember how strict the teaching and behavioural regime expected of them at dance school. The adjectives they used to describe their training at dance school range from it being petty to the extreme, to a strict regime, and enormous discipline. Suffice to say many found it tough going as a process of transformation. One respondent stated categorically that he would advise anyone not to start formal dance training at a ballet school too early in life, as the strict disciplinarian aspect of some schools can impede ones level of maturity development. This was the case for the two who attended the Royal Ballet upper school in London. For the respondents who attended dance schools in Australia, many of them started at varying ages and also at varying stages of their maturity development, so it was very hard to find any consistent criticism apart from that of the strict discipline. All of the respondents admitted their strict classical training helped them gain a career in dancing professionally and helped them to be good dancers as a result. All of the respondents also admitted that despite the arduous and strict training they had to undergo, they never wanted to do anything else but
dance. Two of the respondents did try moving away from their classical dance training to study contemporary dance technique and classes, one in NYC and the other in Brussels.

6.3.2.3 Career and challenges

Career and challenges focuses on the different stages in the respondents’ career and the challenges they each faced, the awards, prizes and scholarships they received, to their undertaking of new challenges during the course of their career. There are two aspects being considered here, centreing around their dancing career and for a number of the respondents, that which revolved around their choreographing career.

In terms of their dancing career, these aspects ranged from their experiences of joining a professional company to performing with the company, and then to their subsequent promotion to Principal dancer within the company. As a member of a professional dance company, many of the respondents raised issues about their performing as a dancer, the acquiring of proper dance technique to the making of decisions to join another dance company.

For some, the transition from dance school to a professional dance company was considered to be a huge task involving some re-education, understanding aspects of performance and artistry, understanding their role in the company and most importantly how to work within the structures of the company. Some professional dance companies are very hierarchical in structure so dancers have to wait their time for promotion unless they are exceptionally talented and got noticed by artistic management in the company. It was not just technical ability, although many had spent hours perfecting their command and mastery of the technique, but also professionalism, that were key ingredients company management were looking for. This fact was responsible for a lot of emotional problems during the course of their careers and for some it forced them to consider moving to other dance companies altogether. For one respondent, the decision to move to another company he considered more prestigious meant he had to begin as a member of the corps de ballet again.
As professional dancers, many believed that an interest in music and having a good sense of music or musicality was one of the key ingredients. Their physical attributes were also another of these key ingredients which required a lot of attention, as one respondent rightfully put it – dance has both a physical and aesthetic requirement. Both requirements however, rely on a combination of both nature and nurture.

In terms of their choreographing, a few stated their chances to be involved with choreographic workshops as the stimulus towards the acceptance of choreographic commissions. Many stated their earlier experiences with choreographic workshops as a starting point for their choreographic career. One respondent in particular mentioned receiving a scholarship from his dance company which enabled him to spend time in Europe and USA visiting with, experiencing, observing and participating in classes with these dance companies. This went a long way towards starting and developing his choreographic career.

Obtaining choreographic commissions was deemed by four respondents as one of the critical events of their lives. In accepting these commissions, they were faced with the choice of an appropriate choreographic style or technique to work with and from. As far as choreographic skills and style, many identified communication as a key skill, which develops with the gaining of maturity and experience. Other sentiments expressed in this area included being able to inspire others, being articulate in what they said, having a strong visual orientation (almost theatrical) and being able to imbue a wonderful lyricism to the movements they created.

Finally, in this section, I will consider the new challenges the respondents had undertaken. For one respondent in particular, the greatest challenge in his dancing career was to rehabilitate himself to the point where he could dance as a differently abled dancer. The largest part of this rehabilitation was not just physical, but also perceptual, in that he had to gradually learn to stop seeing his disabilities and to start looking at his abilities. He finally managed to obtain grants from various State funding organisations to enable him to establish
his own dance company, as he had made it his main focus to educate audiences about their perceptions about dance in relation to differently abled dancers.

For two other respondents, new career challenges involved changing careers to go into teaching for one, and for another, it meant turning towards assuming Assistant and Artistic Directorship. For one respondent, his lack of future recognition as a choreographer, despite his huge successes with AB and AO, saw him turn his attention to teaching dance. He had at the time of the interview expressed great joy and comfort with his teaching and being involved with an Institution which is professionally run.

For the other respondent in this group, he began his Arts Administration career as an Assistant Artistic Director with a dance company, and that position led to other Artistic Director positions. On both occasions, he left positions as Artistic Director because of the socio-political environment he was faced with (as referred to in section 6.3.1.4), and then chose to return home to the UK to pursue further academic study while he made the transition to another position/job/career. Again, the socio-political climate in his own country (UK) forced him to make the decision to move to New Zealand (to be able to live together with his partner) which then began his teaching career. He later moved to become the Director of the NZ SD at the time of the interviews.

What we can learn from their experiences as dancers having to make many decisions in their lives, and these decisions do not necessarily get any easier with the passage of time or the advancement of their dancing or choreographic careers. Sometimes, as it was with these two respondents, the natural progression is and can be broken or interrupted by factors totally beyond their control. A dancer’s career is short to begin with, but extraneous circumstances can cause the premature ending of one career and the start of another, if they are fortunate enough and when opportunities present themselves.
6.3.2.4 Retiring from dance

The final factor to be considered in this section is that relating to a number of different respondents decision to retire from dance altogether. Of the seven people interviewed, at the time, only two had formally retired from dancing. Two others had also retired from dancing per se, but were still engaged in either the teaching of dance in a dance school or in positions of management as the director of a national dance school.

For one respondent, the appointment of a new Artistic Director to the company he danced with professionally signalled the end of his dancing career. He was at that point a Principal dancer with the company. He did attempt to obtain a Ballet Master’s position with his company, but he was not offered the position, so the choice to resign was inevitable. He sought employment in real estate immediately after, and then completed a Bachelor’s degree in Education to finally obtain employment as an adviser with the NZQA. He continued his interest with music and joined a choir, but also continued to teach dance to students qualifying for the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) qualification.

For the other respondent, retiring was the best option for him given his personal circumstances. He had at the time been dancing non-stop for fifteen years and his body was telling him it was time to retire. He retired with an understanding from the Artistic Director of the company that he would be available for the reprisal of character roles he had danced in the past. He left the company and went to work in theatre management, managing a cinema complex and finally with the Victorian Arts Centre in Melbourne. He was living a life in retirement at the time of my interviews.

Very few dancers ever really retire altogether from dance or the dance world. Some opt to attain positions as ballet masters or choreographers in residence with their companies. Many will opt to teach dance after their dancing career, which was the case for two respondents in the group I studied. Of the two, one became the Director of a national dance
school a position of management really, with little opportunity to dance, but not unlike an 
Artistic Director, has both artistic and management challenges to contend with.

On an entirely different level altogether, for one respondent, the end of his dancing 
career as upright and standing person resulted in the beginning of his career as a differently 
abled dancer and choreographer. The decision to end his initial dancing career was not a 
conscious decision. He fought and sought an alternative direction in and to dance. His 
passion to dance was not diminished by the car accident, but in fact spurred him on to want to 
change the world’s perception of dance, by expanding and challenging his artistic and creative 
abilities as a differently abled dancer who danced to a different paradigm, in and with his 
wheelchair. This respondent’s circumstances cannot be seen or deemed to be a natural 
progression of any dancers life and career, but is in fact, an anomaly that shows us that a 
person’s passion to and for dance can be a strong determinant of where one’s end of career 
can take them to. For him, the premature end of his first career found him starting an entirely 
new career. It did not happen by chance or by fortuitous intervention in any way, but he had 
the will to live, and it took time and a lot of determination and hard work on his part to 
achieve his new found status.

The next section of the discussion of the emerging theory will focus how these factors 
are inter-related and integrated with each other, whilst the width and size of the arrows (in the 
outer circle) give an indication of the strength of the relationship between the themes 
representing the intrinsic and extrinsic factors. This relationship is represented in Figure 3.
I am cognisant of the fact that the intrinsic factors familial, sexual, physical and emotional are central, integral and core to the development of any person through the life cycle stages of their development. But key to this study it is the impact these different themes have had on the individual dancer/choreographer’s development. The equidistant and equal lines emanating from the central focus of the study – the individual, demonstrates the equal strength of the relationship between the two different themes. In terms of the extrinsic factors that circumscribe the intrinsic factors, the strength of their relationships with the others is worth considering.
In the discussion above I discussed how the psycho-sexual and socio-cultural/political factors had a strong influence on the degree and range of emotions felt by the individuals in this study. Consequently, the strength of the relationship, especially that between the sexual and emotional, is represented diagrammatically as being stronger than the rest (hence the thicker arrow).

The socio-cultural/political factors of the period would have exerted a fair amount of influence on what was deemed appropriate for males in each family, which in turn would have influenced whether family’s would have allowed their sons to pursue dance training at all. For many of those studied here, it was their mothers who took them to dance classes, so any issues of discontent or disagreement voiced by the fathers would have to be elements the males had to contend with separately and individually.

To the right hand side of this model, there exists another set of relationships. It is clear that the physical aspects of a dancer’s body have had a strong impact on their dance training, and for one respondent, also the main reason for his retirement. A dancer’s physical ability and physicality also has a strong impact on the aspects of his career and the challenges afforded to him. The quality of dance training has the strongest impact on the future career and challenges available to dancers/choreographers. Hence, that relationship is described as being strong and is represented by a thick arrow.

6.4 LOCATION AND DISLOCATION

Edwards and Usher (1997) proposed the concept of “location and dislocation” in terms of curriculum studies (p. 254). They saw location as that “of positioning and of being positioned” which inevitably entails forms of dislocation that “of dis-identifying and being positioned as other” (p. 254) and the fact that “location is simultaneously a dislocation from other positions” (p. 261). I am endeavouring to apply this concept of location and simultaneous dislocation to the model represented above (Figure Three). In this application, I attempt to identify which of the themes from the model help to locate the male respondents as
dancer/choreographers, and as a result identify which of the other themes simultaneously help to dislocate or help them to be positioned as ‘other’ (non-heterosexual males).

Risner (2009, August) stated “boys dancing is both a form of cultural resistance...as society’s dominant ideas about gender and masculinity play large roles in shaping boys lives in dance” (p. 1), and in addition, “the experiences of dancing males provide an important vehicle for challenging dominant notions about gender, privilege, masculinity, sexual orientation, and the male body” (p. 1). This challenging of the dominant ideas can, for some dancers, dislocate them from mainstream society, to be perceived as other. All too often, “dance is viewed as a feminine activity, all males who dance (whether gay or straight) are always in danger of being classified as effeminate, girly, not ‘real men’” (p. 1). “Male privilege presents another set of unique social challenges to deconstruct”, states Risner (2009), as “when boys are privileged as male, but marginalised by homophobic stereotypes or non-heterosexual identity” (August, p. 2). As there are many men who choose to dance, this study is important as it informs us about these men’s “meaning and motivation in dance, as well as the ways in which their dancing challenges gender stereotypes and enlarges ideas about what it means to be male” (p. 2) in an attempt to “educate a highly confused culture to its sexuality and discrimination” (Risner, 2002, p. 66).

This research also deals with a group of other non-heterosexual males, a sexual minority. Acknowledging that there are “other ways of being” (Gray, 1997, p. 89) and this discussion of their experiences provides us with an added insight and understanding as to “how we and others experience the social world” in which we live, and acknowledge “the existence of repressed and subjugated knowledge” (Gray, 1997, p. 90). Gray (1997) points out the fact that in race privileged societies like the USA, many of us are in no position to understand the effects of racism and/or prejudice on others lives, so she chose to use testimony, autobiography, and life story as a means of “knowing (or not knowing) the world which is based on particular standpoint or positionality” (pp. 98–101).
I have testimony, autobiography and life stories in this study to present the position of a sexual minority, in an attempt to understand how they are located and as a consequence dislocated, from the rest of the world. Socially marginalised or oppressed groups, like gay and bisexual men, have “resisted the language used to describe them” (Prowse, 2009, p. 89) as far too often this form of labelling implies that there is something inherently “wrong or different” with them (Prowse, 2009, p. 91). This study is an attempt to show how this group of people are not inherently different in any way from the rest of the population. The intrinsic and some extrinsic themes which had an impact on these individuals are not any different to those that impact other men in society, but what is clear and distinguishing is the strength and direction of the impact of these themes that ultimately locate and simultaneously dislocate them from others.

The intrinsic factors tend to locate or position them first as individuals and then later as dancers. The family has the greatest influence on the individual in terms of genetic dispositions (nature) and also to the nurturing that they receive as infants to young children. Their genetic endowments physically, also help to position them as individual males in society, but more importantly, the existence of a particular body shape and type does go a long way towards their acceptance into dance school and into the profession. So this theme helps to position and/or locate them as early dancers too.

The next two intrinsic factors, although important for the development of every male, are also important themes of dislocation or positioning as ‘other’ for the respondents in this study. The term ‘sexual’ refers to issues of gender, right through to sexuality and sexual identity. Gender is, in and of itself, not a theme of dislocation at all. All males grow up to learn and accept their gender roles in society, as we have seen it is socially and psychologically constructed. It is in this process of learning about their gender and its assigned roles when issues relating to dislocation arise. As demonstrated in this study, many of the respondents in their discovery of their gay sexuality and sexual identity begin to
dislocate themselves from the normal trajectory of heterosexual males. Their self awareness of being different generates feelings of shame and guilt, which is exacerbated by prevailing society’s oppression and stigmatization, begins this whole cycle of dislocation or positioning as other. When they finally do accept their own sexuality and sexual identity through the coming out process, they are further dislocated from main stream society, and hence simultaneously located within the gay or bi-sexual community.

The emotional development of males during the course of their childhood and teenage years is of important consequence for their well being. Their having to deal with resistance from their parents and family, father in particular, have a strong emotional impact that will last for long periods of time into their adult lives. The psycho-sexual factors also have a strong impact on their lives and these have a strong dislocating effect. Gay men have to negotiate the whole issue of being masculine, and yet exhibiting feminine traits especially in their dancing. For others who are trying to come to terms with their own sense of maturity and adulthood, have to additionally navigate the landscape of gay sexuality at the same time. These issues can also be in conflict (for many) as a result of their religious affiliations. All these, added together, present a picture of emotional ups and downs for many of these respondents.

As the socio-cultural/political elements are so closely linked to the intrinsic factor – emotional, I choose to discuss this here together. The socio-cultural/political elements, as far as this study is concerned, had a large and profound effect on the emotional well being of the respondents. Society as a whole decides what appropriate behaviour is for men and the type of jobs they should engage in, so this factor will tend to dislocate or classify these respondents as other. Other socio-cultural/political factors like morality and conscience in the face or racism, prejudice, and discrimination was for one respondent a means of dislocating himself both physically and emotionally from his home country in an attempt to remove himself from all the discrimination practised there. Some sectors of society frown upon same sex
partnerships and relationships, so for many of these respondents, their entering into such relationships had a strong implication on their emotional well being and also on their status within the company, as many had to leave or relocate away to be with their partners. All the other extrinsic factors tend to be locating these respondents in terms of their lives and careers as dancers. Dance training is the greatest and strongest locator for all of the respondents in their development, as would be expected. None of the respondents in the study are able to attribute anything within their dance training which dislocates them from the mainstream.

But what is important to note is that for many the fact that their choice to undertake dance lessons or classes dislocated them from their family, peers, and classmates in school. This dislocation was made more obvious, when they chose dance as their career. A dancing career for men has always been seen as a dislocator, as dance for all intents and purposes, is viewed as feminine, and therefore a career more suited for women. This is a biased point of view but nonetheless one which is widespread especially in culturally masculine societies like the ones we have in Australia and New Zealand.

Regardless of whether they are gay or not, once they attend formal dance training, their training will be the same strict and disciplined approach employed. As far as their dance career is concerned, only one respondent admitted to the fact that his being gay was at one time a reason cited for his lack of promotion within the company. But, he did in the end get that promotion to Principal dancer with the company, but not without much boosting of his own physicality, and hence his perceived maleness and macho quality.

Career challenges like awards, prizes and scholarships help to do nothing but locate someone within the dance world. This makes the dancer more experienced, hence improving his level of skills and thus making him more in demand as a dancer/choreographer. Nothing can make or enhance a male dancer’s career longevity in terms of time. The only case evidenced in this study is when one respondent found that at the end of one aspect of his dancing career he was able to find another paradigm for dance, and hence find a new
resurgence for his next dancing career. This fact alone separates or dislocates his experience from the others.

6.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Overall, it can be seen from this study, the factors that tend to strongly dislocate these respondents from mainstream society are sexually related (gender, sexuality, and sexual identity). These factors go a long way towards understanding how these respondents negotiated their way through the early life cycle stage development of their lives. The acquisition of a sexual identity society perceives as minority, tends to marginalise individuals and subject them to discrimination, resulting in strong emotional responses from these individual. The consequential choices that result from these emotional periods can be equally dislocating for the individuals.

Psycho-sexual factors also have a strong effect because of the strong emotional responses resulting from it. Socio-cultural/political factors like racism, sexism, prejudice, discrimination and morality also elicit a strong emotional response, and these factors can have a strong dislocating effect. Finally, the choice to pursue dance and be a dancer (incorporating the factors of dance training and career and challenges) is a dislocating factor too. Culturally masculine societies will tend to view dance and a dancing as not legitimate careers for males, and will have a dislocating effect. This ultimately results in these men being dislocated as ‘other’.
CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main focus of this research study was to identify, determine and analyse how the respondents negotiated the life cycle stage development of their lives as they navigated through childhood into mature adults. In order to understand their lives, I chose to focus on a number of issues which I determined to be vital in their lives.

7.1 CONCLUSIONS

I began the research by looking at what events, deemed and perceived as being critical, had an impact on the lives of seven dancer/choreographers. I fashioned this into the primary research question. The main research question for this study is:

What are the critical events that impacted the lives of these male dancers and/or choreographers, and why are these events were perceived as being critical by the individuals who directly experienced them?

7.1.1 The critical incidents

Most respondents identified the incidents as being critical as they had a major influence on the direction and in the direction of their lives, using words like life altering, almost turning points in terms of their lives and careers, which is much to be expected. These turning points also involved periods of high emotion and emotional upheavals in relation to their personal and professional lives. The critical incidents were categorised and analysed as being either of a personal or professional nature.

Aspects of the family featured heavily in the section of critical incidents of a personal nature, and they encompassed religion, the relocation of family to larger cities, and the general environment they grew up with in the family circle, were deemed critical elements.
Parents were also strong influencers here: their feelings for their child and their child’s decision to take up dance, whether they supported them in their choice, and for one, the subsequent death of both parents. For many, taking their first dance lesson was also critical, but more importantly, having to leave home to begin or continue their dancing career was very heartfelt and emotional for many.

The next items although personal in nature, differed in that they were not family related or oriented. Having to make personal choices about when to leave the comfort of the dance school, what company to dance with or whether to move to another company were also difficult choices to be made. One respondent particularly felt the need to make his choices based on the socio-political/cultural context in which he found himself in at various points in his career. Finally, many had to make difficult choices, some tried to remain true to the choices they made about their sexual identity and sexuality, as well their own different ability, as they negotiated adulthood and arrive at the point in their lives where they are able to self-identify as non-heterosexual male dancers.

As far as those critical incidents that had a major impact on their lives professionally, the most important component related to their dancing and dance training. What training they first received was deemed critical, as much as their formal ballet training, and their subsequent joining of a professional dance company. However, the next few items were interesting and equally varied in terms of their criticalness to their lives. Every dancer looks forward to new challenges and will be greatly assisted in this with the achievements they make in their professional lives. For some, this meant the gaining of awards, scholarships and even choreographic commissions. This also meant it led them to another phase of their lives – choreographing, and hence, to face new opportunities. Dance injuries plague every dancer’s live so it not surprising to find this as a feature. For many, the end of their dancing careers came at different points in their lives, and for many different reasons. For one, the change in Artistic Directorship signalled the end of his career, for another it was an understanding that
the right time had arrived. For another respondent, the end of his dancing career as an able bodied dancer meant the emergence of a new career, as a differently abled dancer who dances from and with his wheel chair.

To assess, determine, and understand the nature of the impact of these critical incidents, I looked at three distinct areas of concern for my research. First, the problems they encountered as they negotiated their lives as dancer/choreographers, then the decisions they had to make as a direct or indirect consequence of their experiencing these problems, and finally, the requisite skills they possessed, amassed, and used to resolve these problems. It is these concerns that I fashioned into as the secondary research question which I have restated here. The secondary research questions are:

1. What are the problems (personal and professional) these male dancers and/or choreographers faced whilst in pursuit of their individual careers?
2. What are the skills they possessed, and/or acquired, to assist them in the resolution of these problems (as in 1 above), to help them arrive at decision(s) to undertake and implement?
3. What are the decisions they made, as a direct consequence of their experiences with the critical incidents, in the way they lived their lives as dancers and/or choreographers?

**7.1.2 The problems**

The critical events, not surprisingly, also feature heavily in relation to the problems they encountered during the course of their lifetimes. It is difficult not to acknowledge that life changing events and a change of direction in life can, and will often be, seen as being hurdles or obstacles to overcome. For some, this comes with different inherent difficulties’ and problems. Of those events that were classed as critical, many were represented again here, and identified hereto as problems they needed to overcome.

Religion and its tenets of practice provided a source of anguish for two respondents. One sought religion for solace, while the other felt it would bring him closer to his partner.
Religion also forced the latter respondent to make many life changing choices which saw him eventually leave his country of birth. Religion had such a strong impact on another respondent that he felt his sexual identity made him feel deformed in some way.

Although, many of the respondents identified the dance world as being supportive of gay men, one respondent found that being gay did have an impact on his promotional prospects within a professional dance company. Another pointed out that dance can be obsessive and competitive, and to have a partner in the same dance company brought out many insecurities and eventually problems for the relationship. Two respondents found it easier not to partner with anyone from the dance profession altogether.

In terms of choreographic ability and experiences, those that were choreographing and had choreographed in the past, many cite differing ways and approaches to the practice of their craft. Five respondents believed their perception and belief of what constituted a good choreographer, based on their experiences with other choreographers working with them and on them; coloured and influenced their practice. One respondent worked with improvisation, others with music, whilst others were clear of what they wanted and demonstrated how they wanted it performed and danced. Despite the many different approaches, all of them highlighted the sense of accomplishment they felt after seeing their work performed. Choreographing was satisfying and fulfilling work for all of them.

Only one respondent mentioned the powerful sense of belonging he felt for his company and attributed all of that to the intelligence, energy and skill of its Artistic Director. He perceived the company as his family for a long time, and upon his return from an overseas stint, he felt as if he was returning home to his family again. The death of the company’s Artistic Director saw the eventual dissolution of the company, but did pave the way for the founding and establishment of the premier ballet company for Australia. Surprisingly enough, the establishment of this founding ballet company was a direct result of the lobbying
efforts of the Artistic Director brought in to replace the man who had founded the company (my respondent) had called his family.

Finally, the respondent who overcame his own disability – physical, mental, and perceptual – to become a young man of different ability is worthy of mention here. His perception of his problem, not being to walk, caused him much anguish as he saw his ability as a dancer firmly rooted in his being a person who was upright and on two feet. A chance encounter by friends in NYC changed his life completely. They found him someone who was able to show him a different paradigm for dance – in and with a wheelchair, and that was enough for him to find his freedom to move and to dance again.

For many dancers, as part of their entry into formal dance training, an assessment of their physique and physicality would have been undertaken and all through their training they would have developed a strong and heightened sense of their own physical abilities and endowments and have to work consistently to overcome their inherent limitations.

A study of dance schools’ curriculum gives insight and understanding that their dance training was tough, rigorous and disciplined, and young dancers in the making would not cope with that well, especially the discipline. This was the case with many of the respondents.

As performers in a professional dance company, many found the hierarchical structure of most companies another difficult transition to make. The many difficulties they faced at that juncture inevitably affected their future career progression, promotion and even have an influence on their dancing and/or their need to find another company that better suited their requirements, skills and tastes. It is at this stage that the availability of mentors and mentoring becomes of paramount importance. Some of the respondents were fortunate with mentors, whilst many others were not.

For many of the respondents, choreographing did not come to them naturally. For a number of them, the opportunities presented were in terms of choreographic workshops whilst at the dance school or at the dance company. Nonetheless, those that took advantage of the
opportunities found they liked it, and sought to do more of it. One respondent found that he was good at it, and the company thought him good at it too, and offered him many opportunities to choreograph, but at the time all he wanted to do was dance, so he found choreographing as signalling an end to his dancing career.

A few sought new opportunities abroad or in related fields to dance. One would eventually move into teaching at a time when he considered he was at the pinnacle of his career, but opportunities did not eventuate or continue, so he chose to teach instead. Another sought out Artistic Direction and Management.

7.1.3 The decisions made

Many decisions had to be made by these respondents as they tried to overcome the problems they encountered. I considered the respondents’ decision making process in terms of chronological order from the time they decided to undertake their first dance class to the time of their retirement. It was impossible to undertake this analysis in terms of a strict chronological time line as many things occur at the same time, with some material overlaps. But more importantly, not all respondents will experience their decision making in the same chronological order and at the same age or life cycle stage.

What is common for many of the respondents is their commitment to dance from an early age, with only one respondent taking up dance much later in life. Although, some of the respondents began with tap and jazz dance, they eventually all moved into the sphere of ballet when undertaking formal dance training. Research does show that many boys start in their early teens, but one of them began in his late teens.

For the respondents, their choices of attending formal dance schools were limited to the Royal Ballet Upper School in London (for two respondents) while the rest were attending either VCA (or VCASS) or ABS. After their formal training, decisions had to be made about which company to dance with professionally. Once they were accepted into a company, there was never any guarantee that their contracts would be renewed, so for some it also meant the
need to consider other dance companies whether in search of a more prestigious company, in search of promotion, or to get overseas dance experience. Dancing overseas also meant that for some, relocation from their home country was required. All of the respondents had to make decisions in their dance career and that is to be expected given the nature of the profession they are in.

For two of the respondents who sought alternative career paths other than dancing and choreographing, this meant they had to consider undertaking postgraduate study or teaching qualifications. One the respondents who at the time of the interviews was enjoying the beginnings of a choreographic career, undertook a postgraduate diploma to allow him to branch out into other spheres as he did admit to seeing his dancing career coming to an end.

As the respondents got older, many had to make decisions about whether to remain as a dancer, to choreograph, to retire, to teach or to branch out into Artistic Direction and Management. One respondent chose to retire and retrained for another vocation altogether. Another chose to retire altogether and moved into theatre management. One other, at an early age, was fortunate enough to be considered for Assistant Artistic Director and later Artistic Director positions overseas. His social and political conscience made it impossible for him to continue in that career progression and he returned to study, to teach dance and later became the director of a dance school. During the course of their dancing careers many of the respondents also made decisions about who to learn from, be they mentors, friends, other dancers, choreographers and even Artistic Directors. The role of mentors featured heavily amongst the respondents.

Many commented about their opportunities to choreograph coming out just by chance. Some were deliberately nurtured in their choreographic pursuits, whilst others saw opportunities to choreograph and jumped at the chance. Not all the respondents interviewed had long and successful choreographic careers, one was only beginning in this career, another
was in the middle stage of his choreographic career, whilst on other enjoyed great success in his works for both opera and ballet.

For one respondent, he had to make a number of difficult decisions in his career, many of which were life altering. After being the only survivor in a car accident, he decided to return home to Australia so that he could get medical treatment. He then went through months of rehabilitation before he could resume his life as a differently abled person. This was followed by another period of physical and emotional anguish trying to decide what to do next with his life. He chose to pursue a different paradigm for life as a dancer and firmly established himself at the forefront of dance as a differently abled dancer and choreographer.

Such decisions are hard to make and at the time, the person is so involved and entrenched in it, they hardly see or acknowledge the strength required making them or the implications imbedded in their decisions. A little reflection on their part comes a long way in their understanding of their decisions. This is what I found when I asked them to reflect on their lives, and later, discussing these issues with the respondents interviewed.

7.1.4 The skills used

I believe that there is a direct relationship between the problems these respondents encountered in their lives, and the consequent decisions they made. The integrating element between the two is the skills they either had innately or acquired through their lives and careers that made it possible for them to make these decisions. It is the glue that makes it possible for them to continue with the progression through their life cycle stage development.

In terms of their innate skills, many of those identified were expected, and they ranged from their individual interest in music to their own physicality and physiognomy. Other more latent skills relate to things like performance skills, which for one came naturally as he came from a family of theatre and vaudeville performers. Other skills identified were honesty, respect, trust and sincerity as hallmark qualities, but these you obtain and learn by and with your relationship with family members, and for a few, helped train and prepare them for
sexual partners. Finally, a passion and love for the art is also a key ingredient for a couple of respondents, and these skills are innate and intrinsic to individuals in terms of their nature. What is also interesting to note is that the innate skills for a dancer are also similar to those skills required for a choreographer, although, many cite a good knowledge of music as integral for every choreographer.

Of the skills acquired, one expects dance technique to be first and foremost as it is the cornerstone of every dancer’s life. Any dancer, who wants to make the progression to be a choreographer, learns quickly that the key to good choreographing is being a good communicator. All of the respondents identified this particular skill as being critical, in addition to self-confidence, trust (in their own material and in the dancers) and a good grasp of performing styles.

The final list of acquired skills stands much by themselves. First, is the ability to work as a dancer with others in a company, as part of a team, and their ability to work together as a team is perceived by all as being vitally important. Allied to this, but not necessarily related, is the skill of being able to value others that you work with, in terms of who they are, and also in terms of what they have to share with you. Being able to model yourself against another dancer can be very advantageous for a dancer going through the ranks of a company. This would be in addition to having a mentor or guide.

To be mentored and to model against someone else requires an additional skill, and that is the ability to accept criticism. However, many of the respondents have identified one major fact – part of the training of ballet dancers uses an archaic system of harsh correction with punitive actions being taken against the dancers should they make any faults. This form of criticism and discipline for many is harsh and seen as being unbending, making the system inflexible, and for some quite intolerable, so many rebel against the system in their private and personal ways. Finally, for many of them, to be a good dancer involves taking risks, and a few respondents talked of their dancing and choreographing as about taking risks too.
In the last chapter, I discussed what I acknowledge as being the limitations of the research I undertook (see section 6.2). Many of the limitations discussed relate to the attributes of the sample group used in this study. Using that previous discussion as a point of departure, I wish to like to take that discussion further and enhance it by looking at what I consider to be further areas of possible research that can be undertaken, which was not possible given the boundaries of the research questions I set out for myself here. I will now consider and recommend possible areas of further research which could be derived or extended from my own research.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

My first recommendation revolves around an extension of the current research undertaken. This extension of the research involves adding a series of different facets and attributes.

To begin with, I would increase the sample size to include more representatives from each of the two groups being investigated (Australia and New Zealand) to include respondents from the different major cities in both countries. Australia and New Zealand both have vibrant performing arts companies now represented in all the major cities. Auckland and Christchurch in New Zealand both have a number of dance companies in residence. In Australia, there are a number of dance companies in Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth.

An added feature would be to include respondents representing both classical and contemporary dance companies. Classical dance training is radically different from that of contemporary dance training. Of course, it is obvious that many dancers in contemporary companies may also have classical training, so they would be in a better position to know and highlight the differences between the two dance forms.

Finally, I would like to have respondents representing the different age groups, from those in their twenties to those in their fifties. For those in their early twenties, their experiences would relate to being at the start of their careers as members of the corps de
ballet. Those in their late twenties to early thirties would encompass those further up the hierarchy, like coryphées and soloists. Finally, those in their late thirties and older would be those who would have achieved principal dancer status. Those who are older would encompass those who have retired and/or who are doing ballet master roles, teaching or being administrators of companies.

Another recommendation would be to enlarge the sample group to include other predominantly English speaking countries like Canada, England, Scotland and Ireland. These countries all have similar histories and backgrounds, and as such their socio-cultural and socio-political contexts would be similar, making comparisons less problematic. Although the USA is an English speaking country, I feel their socio-cultural and socio-political context would make comparisons rather difficult. This would be further complicated by the large ethnic diversity inherent in the population in the USA. Ethnicity could be another important component worth considering.

Yet another enhancement of the current research would involve including heterosexual men into the sample. The purpose of the research then would be to see if there are significant differences between their experiences, and those of non-heterosexual male dancers and choreographers. In this study, I would be looking at the sexual component and sexuality in the world of dance. Many psychological studies have been done in these areas, but not necessarily as a means of comparing their individual dance experiences.

During the course of this research, I became very interested and intrigued by the concept of a person’s experience of dance. On a number of different occasions, I had to ask myself, what is it that I enjoyed about a dance? I came up with a number of different facets worth considering here. Was I just enjoying the aesthetics of the dance, the purity of the lines, the feelings it invoked, and/or the joy of feeling the movement itself?

In addition, I was also struck by the idea of whether it was the experience of the dance that intrigued me and kept me riveted. These were all overlaid with the concept of masterful
execution (technique) and masterful expression (innate and intrinsic to the dancer). Which begs the question: What are the features an audience really sees – the aesthetics and the experience of the dance, or the execution and expression? That would be an interesting concept to research.

Another recommendation for further research was suggested by reading the works of Doug Risner. His research raises the issue of how dance is taught, and questions if the strict disciplinarian approach and model is still appropriate, and is an alternative model needed today. Many of the respondents stated that their training was inordinately strict and the discipline was tough and inflexible. I remember a respondent commenting that his training made him only aware and perceive his mistakes and nothing else. Maybe, it is time for another approach.

More specifically, another piece of research could investigate and analyse the way dance is taught to males students. And as many researchers have pointed out, their training was seldom congruent and cognisant of the social and ethnic minorities represented in the dance world today. Although, classical dance technique itself does not and has not changed over the decades, but, it is how we nurture and train these young men which is in question here. The physical, emotional, and psychological consequences of this training are what we are focussing here.

Finally, what I feel is worth investigating is this passion that males in particular feel for dance. This passion has to be all consuming for them to even consider entering into a field that causes many of them so much physical and emotional pain. What I would like to investigate is what constitutes this passion, how this passion manifests itself in terms of their behaviour and interests, how they came about getting this passion and the means, methods, and strategies they employed in pursuing and fulfilling this passion.
7.3 IN CLOSING

This research study has been a journey of discovery for me. It has increased and heightened my awareness of myself, who I am, and what I am. I remember distinctly as a child, how my perception of life and the world around me was totally dependent on my five senses – sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste, and my version of the world was predicated by what I saw, heard, touched, smelt, and tasted. But, instinctively and deep down within the core of my being, I still had a strong sense of self, and finally came to a realisation that life and the world could not just be the sum total of all my experiences alone. I do recall thinking at the time, how life felt so singularly individual and at times lonely. In reality, I was constantly interacting with my parents and my siblings, and yet still felt exactly the same and individual. I have to admit it was at a time in my life when I had little awareness of the pressures of maturity and adulthood, of the expectations of my gender, and the trials and tribulations that would ensue as I realised my sexuality and sexual identity.

As I grew older, I became cognisant of the fact that I could never see or perceive life through anyone else’s eyes, to understand how and what they felt about their lives while they were living it. In fact, there are literally billions of other people with their own unique insights, perceptions, and experiences. Put them all together and what we obtain is a huge mosaic that can assist us to build up a picture of life in this world. The sum total of these individual and personal narratives, perceptions, insights, and experiences becomes more than just data or information, but something more important and what we term as knowledge. It is from knowledge that we get insight and understanding. This study achieved knowledge and understanding through a collection of individuals’ recollected and recounted stories and experiences (personal narratives), hence, providing a shared insight into the lives of male dancer/choreographers in Australia and New Zealand.

Finally, I would like to add that every person lives and leads an individual and gendered life. It is inherent in the way we live our lives, the way we experience our lives, and
most importantly, in the way we perceive our lives in relation to what we do and see, and how we value what we do and see. We are all unique biologically, from our unique finger prints (representing for me, what we do) and in our individual retina (representing for me, what we see), but what really makes us interesting as individuals, is how we navigate and traverse the course of our life time, analogously travelling along a river, and with the decisions we make at every meander and bend over the course of the journey of our life time, helps us to finally arrive at the ocean, our journey’s end.
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LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Plain Language Statement and Consent Form
Appendix 2 - Ethics Committee Clearance
Appendix 3 - Daily Ballet Class - Observation
Appendix 4 - Interview Questions
Appendix 5 – Dance performances attended from 2000 - 2009
APPENDIX 1: PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT AND CONSENT FORM

Plain Language Statement

My name is A.W. Brian De Silva. I am currently enrolled for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) at RMIT University, in the Department of Industry, Professional and Adult Education (IPAEd). I am undertaking to write a thesis titled ‘Bar(re)ing the Soul’ - A Naturalistic Enquiry into the lives of male dancer/choreographers.

This thesis aims to assess, describe and discuss the important and/or critical events that have impacted on the lives of male dancer/choreographers. I am seeking to undertake research to determine how similarly or differently respondents experienced these critical events, what meanings they attached to these experiences, and the relevance these events have had on their lives.

This information invites you to consider being a part of the project. You can become involved by participating in the program of interviews that will be undertaken.

If you would like to contribute to this work you must read the following information regarding privacy and consent.

1. All participants in this program must sign a consent form.
2. You will remain anonymous, as your identity will not be revealed.
3. All information provided will be treated with strictest confidence, and only used within this project.
4. Access to the raw data will be restricted only to myself and my supervisor(s).
5. All interviews will be audiorecorded. A copy of the audiotapes will be sent to you if you so desire. A copy of the transcription of interviews will be sent to you for verification and for contextual checking.
6. On completing the research, a thesis will be published and copies will be circulated to supervisor(s) and any other external examiner(s) as required by the University. In this material all participants and identifying information will be protected as discussed by anonymity.

Please note that participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time during the research. Please find attached a letter of consent to be signed and returned.

Should you have any problems or queries, please do not hesitate to contact me
A.W. Brian De Silva (B.Bus., M.B.A., M.Ed (Arts Admin))
Home (03) 9510 2404 Mobile (0412) 754 658.

Or if you require any further clarification please contact my supervisor: Dr David Forrest,
RMIT University, Department of Industry, Professional and Adult Education, Tel: (03) 9925 7831.

A.W. BRIAN DE SILVA

For any further detail about completion of this form, or for additional supporting material, please contact the Secretary of your Faculty HRE Sub Committee or the Secretary to the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee C/o University Secretariat, (03) 9925 1745.
APPENDIX 2: ETHICS COMMITTEE CLEARANCE

6/06/2001

Your amended Ethics application was sighted by the chair of the Faculty Human Research Ethics sub-committee on 2/11/2000. Your Doctor of Philosophy Ethics application was submitted to the Faculty Board for approval at its meeting held 25/01/2001.

This now completes the Ethics procedures.

We wish you well in your research. Should you have any further questions regarding your application please do not hesitate to contact me on 9925 7840 or email heather.fehring@rmit.edu.au.

Yours sincerely

Heather Porter
Higher Degree Officer

Dr. Heather Fehring
Chair
Faculty of Education, Language and Community Services
Human Research Ethics Sub-committee

cc: Head of Department
Dr David Forrest
APPENDIX 3: DAILY BALLET CLASS - OBSERVATION

This is a transcription of notes taken at an observation of a classical technique class. The purpose of attending this class was to get some idea of what it would be like in a daily technique class at a ballet company.

This class was the First Teachers Seminar for 2002 at the New Zealand School of Dance (NZSD), as part of the celebrations of the 35th Anniversary of NZSD

Observation: Classical technique class
Conducted by: Martin James, Principal Dancer at Royal Danish
Date and Time: 19 April, 2002 at 9 a.m.
Venue: Rehearsal Studios at NZSD.

The objectives in the observation were to determine

1. What is important in and with technique class
2. Method of transferring information and technique
3. The personality and character of teacher and class
4. The teaching of male dancers - vocabulary.

The set up of the studio space: A large empty room (warehouse space) with barrés set up at the sides and in the centre of the room. The atmosphere of the ritual of a daily class with students limbering and doing warm ups. Mirrors line one side of the room. There was an established rapport with the teacher already, as he had done classes with them prior to this class. There was casual talk and discussion in the practice room. Most students were doing warming up exercises on the feet to allow for articulation through the feet.
His manner was quiet, gentle, and unassuming. In basic technique and training, the use of the feet is important. Warming up of the feet is therefore also important. He moves around the class observing, giving correction and adjustment.

The students are familiar with all the exercises so there was no need to go through it with them. He just needed to call out the plies. There was very rigid structure to the class and the training, with lots of repetitions.

He works with the students, correcting their movements in a non threatening way, by using encouraging words. He identifies the parts of the room/areas where the exercises will take place and where students will be engaged in the execution of the exercises. The emphasis is on the uniformity of the movement, so it’s very easy to spot mistakes/problems or where adjustments are needed. In making the criticism, he uses humour so as to defuse the situation a little. The emphasis is on the working of the feet…point and pushing through the feet. He was encouraging…“That was good guy”…and then makes the correction or criticism. This individual adjustment of students is an entirely different approach used when correcting an entire class.

The daily class to the observer looks as if they are on display, a spectacle…as if the technique was on display for “scrutiny”. This is training for the performance when the technique is fully on display. The placement of feet, legs, alignment - that is the key!

He is constantly looking at the students…at what he says and going through the motions of the exercise. He also highlights possible errors or where students are likely to make mistakes…as a good teacher should. Students learn good technique from the teacher and ballet master, as the mastering of technique is key!

A good teacher gives good clear instructions, with demonstrations, using analogies…keeps a keen eye on the student’s movements. Sequence of warm up exercises…start with toes, heels, thighs (plies), elevations, hip movements…then to preparation for jumps, speed sequence, the upper body “port de bra”
Strength work for men involve doing push ups…wide arms, and arms close to the body.

Moving away from the barre to the centre of the room…incorporating upper body with feet warm ups. He teaches the students how to put sequences together, and memory work on sequences. Progression of sequences to incorporate turns into movements.

Turns…begins with single, double …to passés (turning with bent legs)

He uses positive reinforcement cues “working for all of you…but, I want you to see it” He inspires students to do well in class, encourages them, supports them, positive reinforcement.

Sometimes works with the men alone…strength work in and with the legs. He points out what needs to be done to achieve the desired outcome. He does focus on men doing sequences at times….sometimes focuses on them especially. Makes them work on sequence of jumps …faster and then going further.
APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

FIRST ROUND OF INTERVIEWS (Phase One) - DAY ONE

Questions:       General review

1. How did you get into this line of work i.e. dance

2. How do you identify in terms of religion

3. What impact did religion play in your life as a dancer…explain

4. Describe what dancing/choreographing means to you

5. How do you feel when you dance/choreograph

6. Describe the critical events you identified

7. What was critical about them

8. When did you start dancing

9. What started you dancing

10. Why did you continue to dance/choreograph

11. What role did music play in your dancing/choreographing career

12. What qualities do you believe make a good dancer

13. What qualities do you believe make a good choreographer

14. Would you please describe your first dance lesson

15. Would you please describe your first piece of choreography

16. Would you please describe how you felt in the process of choreographing

17. What did you learn from your experience at the ABS

18. What did you learn from your experience at the TAB
**FIRST ROUND OF INTERVIEWS - DAY TWO**

Issues: Questions relating to critical incidences

**Questions:**

1. What perceptions about life do you bring with you to dance
2. Identify the values and beliefs you bring with you to dance
3. How do you identify yourself sexually…what is your sexually identity
4. How did this influence your choice of profession and career
5. Why did you leave the AB to go overseas
6. What did your experience overseas contribute to your dancing/choreographing
7. Why did you return to Australia to dance with the AB

**SECOND ROUND OF INTERVIEWS (Phase Two) - DAY ONE**

Issues based on “Sexual orientation in professional dance” - Bailey and Oberschneider

**Questions:**

1. Sexual orientation and membership influence career choice
2. Know other gay people in the company - influenced choice
3. Who first got you involved in dance
4. Experiences in dance influenced sexual orientation
5. Culture in dance supportive of sexual orientation
6. Did you have a sexual relationship with other dances
7. Do you see dance as being feminine…is it especially enjoyable
8. Do you consider your vocational experience is vs social norms
9. Did you feel you had to rise vs social bias to be a dancer, or to do dance
10. How would you describe your identity as a dancer
11. Do you ascribe personality traits/characteristics that make a good dancer
SECOND ROUND OF INTERVIEWS - DAY TWO

Issues based on “A dancer takes flight” - William L Earl (1988)

Stages of ego development:

**First stage: Symbiotic Stage**

Questions:

1. Which had greater influence on your development as a dancer/choreographer Heredity vs. Environment?
2. Did you have a happy home environment? What influence on career

**Second stage: Egocentric Stage**

Questions:

1. Did you feel unusual or different from other members of the family. If yes, how.
2. How did that make you feel…affect the family dynamics
3. How did it affect your future as a dancer/choreographer
4. Was your family strict in terms of home life? If so how.
5. Was your father judgmental of your life
6. Did he feel dance was feminine…feel shame or disgrace
7. How did this affect you or make you feel
8. Did you ever run away to avoid weakness and shame
9. Did dance school have strict rules…how was that different from home
10. Dance training - structured, rigid in execution…how did it affect you
11. Male dancers had to exhibit particular character and behaviour…emphasised in your training as male dancers - How?
12. Was this in conflict with the growing awareness of your own sexuality? How?
14. How did this feeling of apartness(sexual orientation) affect you in later life
Third stage: Sociocentric Stage

Questions:
1. Why did you go into ballet…rejected other areas of development?
2. Were you aware of your own drives and desires when you entered dance school
3. Were you aware of the acquisition of a body…how achievement is admired
4. Did you compare yourselves - physicality, ability, technique, male role models
5. Did you try to model yourself as your hero(es)

Fourth stage: Universalistic Stage
Understanding your ability as a dancer

Questions:
1. Competence with the language of ballet- did it make you self confident
2. Did this self confidence make you feel better as a man? If yes, how?
3. At what stage in your life did you finally believe(self identify) you were a ballet dancer
4. Did someone nurse you in your dance career? If yes. Whom?
5. Did you spend vast amounts of time in the dance studio rehearsing
6. Did you spend vast amounts of time perfecting your technique
7. Did you spend vast amounts of time in the dance studio acquiring/honing your skill
8. Explain the ritual of the daily ballet class
9. Did you travel great distances to work with particular choreographers
10. Which ballet masters or choreographers influenced you the most? Why? How?
11. Did ballet serve to increase your self esteem, gain acceptance, reduce anxiety
12. Role of a choreographer - assist in the acquisition of dance vocabulary?
13. Do you see yourself as being gifted and owe it to yourself to fulfil your promise.
14. Are you self fulfilled as a dancer?
APPENDIX 5:    DANCE PERFORMANCES attended from 2000 – 2009

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