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INTRODUCTION

- “You can lose yourself in theatre. You can believe in ballet—in the art and in the artists who practice it, for **[ballet dancers] are not ordinary people with ordinary needs and ordinary desires. They are a breed apart.**” (Gordon, 1983)
- Various challenges ballet dancers may face during their training and career are well documented.
 - A dancer’s life is highly demanding, and dancers begin their training at a young age and dedicate much of their time and energy to ballet.
- However, there is dearth of research exploring how ballet dancers persevere despite hardships in their career.
- Previous research on dancers largely focused on pre-professional student dancers or on a specific challenge (e.g., eating disorder, physical injuries) experienced by dancers
- There is a lack of more integrative exploration of professional ballet dancers’ experience in their career

OBJECTIVES

To understand and explore how professional ballet dancers can persevere in a ballet company by drawing upon personal wisdom of retired professional ballet dancer based on their lived experience

METHODS

Qualitative methods were used to collect data from retired professional dancers who trained and performed internationally

Participants:

- 9 retired professional ballet dancers** (6 female, 3 male); Highest rank in the company - Corps de Ballet (3), Soloist (2), Principal Dancer (4)

Age		Years in a Company		Years since Retirement		Number of Companies	
Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
53	45-63	11	1-18	23	8-40	3	1-8

Data Collection & Analysis:

- Conducted 1 to 2 hours **narrative interviews** with each participant; audio-recorded/transcribed
- An **inductive thematic coding** method used to develop core themes & subthemes (Braun & Clark, 2006)

FINDINGS

Be Proactive

“If you wanted to do a special role that you’re not cast in, you can maybe say, “Can I attend those rehearsals? Can I be in the back and learn those roles? I’m not expecting to do any shows, but I would like to learn it. I would like to be in those rehearsals.” If the director says, “Yea. Of course. If you don’t have anything else, then of course you can go.” If also shows the director that you’re eager because they can only see so much in class. They see talent, but they don’t know about the drive inside, and what a person is made of. Sometimes, those moments really shine. Many times, people get injured on stage in a show. You have to jump in right there because the stage is literally empty.”

Diversify Your Training/Techniques

“Cross training is a chance to balance extreme dynamics of dance. With some of the form of physical activity, which brings general health, a balance to the body, and counteracts, perhaps, a little bit of extreme nature of dance to help your body stay healthy and balanced.”

Have a Life Outside Ballet

- “The best, earnest are the ones that actually also read and write and maybe play an instrument. They have other hobbies. Balance their personalities and balance the facets of who they are as a person. It makes you an original artist. That’s their forte.”
- “There certainly are down moments. There are certainly times when you are not happy. You have to take joy in other things. Take joy in your outside life. Whether it’s a partner, girlfriend, boyfriend, or other things: seeing movies or dinners or something like that.”

Reach Out for Support

- “Find a mentor. Find someone within the company. It could be outside of course. Who has wisdom and knowledge and someone you admire and whose qualities you seek to own as well in your way, and create a relationship where you are able to find support and guidance, and answers to some of the questions you will have as you make your way to your dance career.”

Manage Your Expectations

- “Psychologically, I think it’s acceptance. I think it’s, if you accept who you are and are willing to work with that, I think it creates much healthier, much healthier psychological environment for you.”
- “Perfection will never be attained, but the game and the fun is in working towards that.”

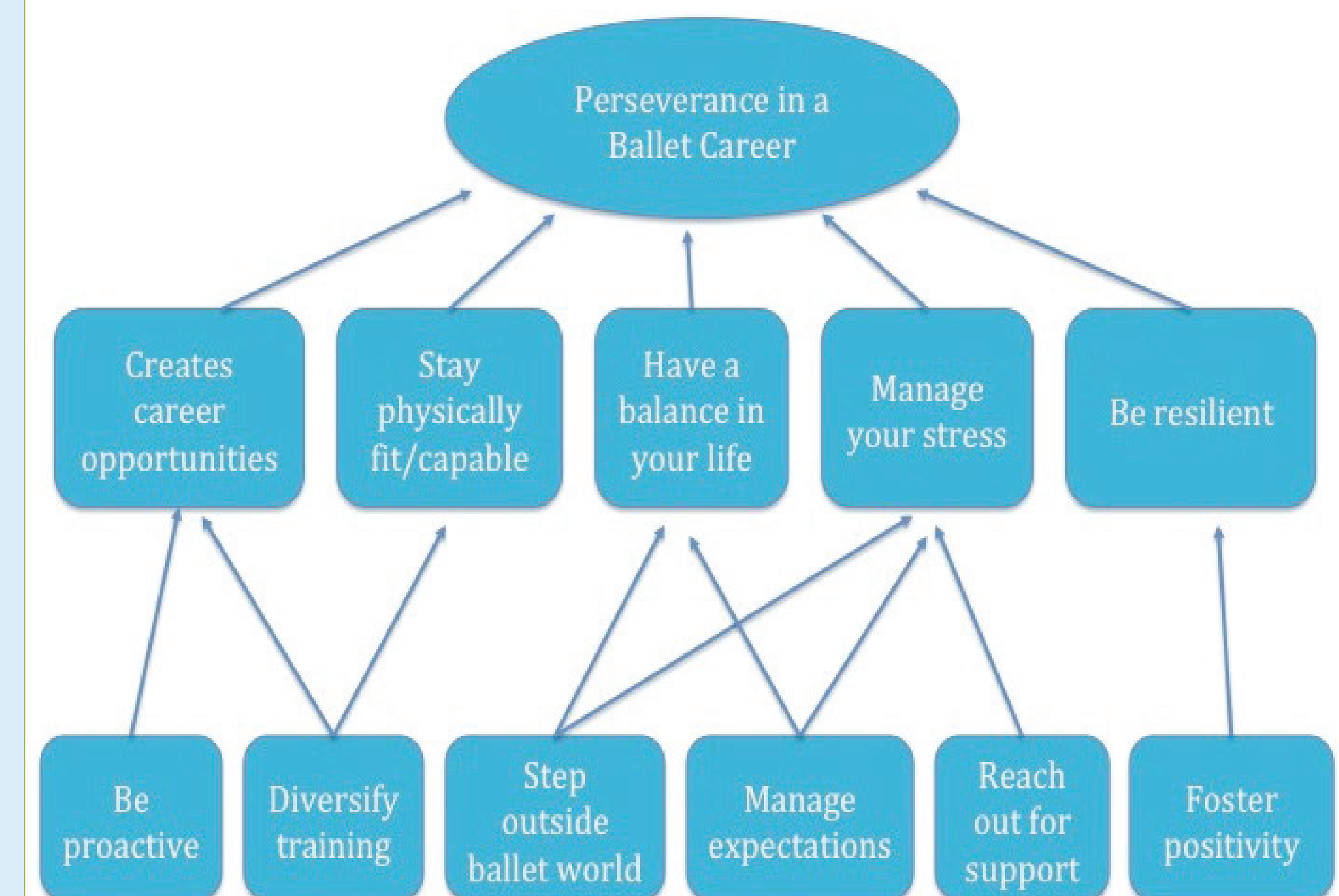
Increase Self-Awareness

“I would say that probably the biggest is knowing yourself. One of the most difficult things we have as an artist is introspective capacity to look at what we do, who we are, what we are capable of, and judge it with certain distance. We’re either crushed by our inabilities or our weaknesses. Sometimes, inversely, overdramatically so. Overproportionately so.”

Foster Positivity

I remember having to tell her, “It doesn’t matter how bad the ballet is. Nobody cares. They’re only gonna look at you and me dancing ballet. They’re not gonna find the choreographer, call him, and say, “Your piece was bad.” They’re just gonna watch us and say we were bad. I’m not gonna do that. I’m not gonna dance badly, even though the ballet itself is bad. I agree with you. The piece is bad, but in 10 days, we’re on stage. Your bad attitude doesn’t change anything. It just makes us have harder rehearsals.”

DISCUSSION



KEY REFERENCES

- Mickler, C., & Staudinger, U. M. (2008). Personal wisdom: Validation and age-related differences of a performance measure. *Psychology and Aging, 23*(4), 787-799.
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