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PROLONGING THE DANCE CAREER: SUSTAINABILITY
AND ACCESSIBILITY FOR MID-TO-LATE
CAREER ARTISTS

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PROLONGING THE DANCE CAREER: SUSTAINABILITY
AND ACCESSIBILITY FOR MID-TO-LATE
CAREER ARTISTS

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
SCHOOL OF DANCE

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Dedication

For my dance family, for the broader dance communities that continue to shape and sustain this field, for the dancers who shared their lived experiences, and for my body—past, present, and unfolding.

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Abstract:

Longevity in the field of professional dance is examined empirically in pursuit of generalized practices to benefit artists seeking to extend their performative years, regardless of age or career maturity, rather than recognition of individual achievements or exceptions in this area. Drawing from embodied inquiry through personal practice and performance-as-research, combined with qualitative interviews with dancers across career stages, geographic locations, and professional contexts, the present study investigates how dancers sustain artistic, physical, and professional engagement over time. Rather than framing aging as decline, participants consistently described longevity as an adaptive process shaped by listening, care, access, and permission.

Through personal praxis and performance-as-research, this thesis positions the dancing body as a site of knowledge. Improvisational performance, somatic practices, and choreographic inquiry are used to explore visibility, endurance, and witnessing, asking how dancers are seen, valued, and permitted to continue working as their bodies change. Performance emerges not as documentation, but as a mode of inquiry capable of generating insights unavailable through analysis alone.

Interview findings reveal that sustaining a dance career is influenced by interconnected factors including mindset, cross-training, recovery practices, financial stability, community networks, and institutional support. Dancers emphasized the importance of personal health that is dance-informed, including preventative approaches to injury, ongoing anatomical learning, and diversified professional pathways. These lived strategies closely align with applied research framing dancers as high-performance bodies whose longevity depends on structural design rather

than individual resilience alone.

The thesis concludes with combined consideration of lessons learned from practical and interview research methods, with a focus on applicable takeaways for active dancers. Ultimately, this research argues that longevity in dance is not defined by duration, but by the conditions that allow dancers to remain in meaningful relationship with their work across a lifetime. Sustaining dance careers requires collective responsibility, representation, and systems designed to support change rather than deny it.

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CHAPTER I

A Lived Question: Beyond Presumed Endpoints

This thesis began not as an abstract research question, but as a lived one. At forty six, I remain deeply invested in my performing career and committed to continuing that work into a largely uncharted future. I am not interested in sustaining dance as a concept removed from the body, but in understanding how a dancing life can continue—physically, artistically, and meaningfully—when no clear timeline or endpoint is provided by the field itself.

This research emerges from the tension between these two realities: a field that often imagines dance careers as short, and the many dancers who continue working far longer than expected. Sustaining a long-term professional practice brought me into direct conversation with this contradiction and raised questions that were largely absent from my early training. What does sustainability actually look like over time? How do dancers adapt to bodily change without being framed as diminished? What systems and practices of care, knowledge, and support make longevity possible—and who has access to them?

At the center of this project is the question: How can performance-based inquiry, where performance serves as both a research process and a space in which knowledge emerges through movement, improvisation, and lived experience, reveal new understandings of aging, visibility, and sustainability in contemporary dance practice? Rather than asking whether dancers can dance beyond youth, this thesis asks how the field might better support dancers who already do.

This inquiry is grounded in a Practice-as-Research (PaR) methodology, in which artistic practice is not only informed by research but a mode of investigation in itself. As dance scholar and performer-researcher Susanne Martin argues in her examination of aging through improvisation-based performance practice, PaR understands artistic creation and performance as constitutive components of research methodology rather than as illustrations of pre-existing knowledge.¹ Within this approach, knowledge emerges through the processes of making, performing, reflecting, and critically engaging with artistic practice.

The performance component of this thesis therefore functioned as a site of inquiry rather than a demonstration of findings. Developed through improvisational processes, the work provided an opportunity to investigate questions of aging, visibility, endurance, adaptation, and artistic sustainability through embodied experience. Consistent with PaR approaches, the performance generated forms of tacit and experiential knowledge that could then be critically reflected upon, alongside the interview data collected from twenty-four professional dancers. Martin reinforces PaR theorists Kershaw and Nicholson's supposition that PaR creates fluid and responsive relationships between researcher, research process, and subject matter, allowing tacit understandings and embodied forms of knowledge to become visible and open to critical examination.²

At the same time, this project incorporates an autoethnographic dimension. As both researcher and performer, I occupied a dual role within the research premise. Drawing on performance theorist Tami Spry's conception of autoethnography as an embodied methodological practice, my experiences within the improvisational process are treated as a source of research insight rather than merely personal reflection.³ Through rehearsal, performance, and critical self-reflection, the project examines how aging is negotiated, experienced, and made visible

1. Susanne Martin, *Dancing Age(ing): Rethinking Age(ing) in and through Improvisation Practice and Performance* (Transcript Publishing, February 2017), 47–8, ISBN: 9783839437148, <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839437148>.

2. Martin, *Dancing Age(ing)*, 47–48.

3. Tami Spry, "Performing Autoethnography: An Embodied Methodological Praxis," *Qualitative Inquiry - QUAL INQ* 7 (December 2001): 706–32, <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040100700605>.

within contemporary dance practice. Meanwhile, in recognizing the limits of my own autoethnographic exploration in universal application, this lived experience is presented alongside interview data and theoretical scholarship as one of several avenues through which questions of aging, visibility, and sustainability can be explored.⁴

The project is additionally grounded in qualitative interviews with dancers spanning a range of career stages, professional contexts, and geographic locations. These conversations revealed an expansive and often generous understanding of longevity—one shaped not only by physical practice, but by mindset, community, access to care, financial stability, and permission. Participants repeatedly challenged deficit-based narratives of aging, instead framing sustainability as an ongoing process of listening, adaptation, and renegotiation. Rather than isolating these interviews within a single chapter, their insights are woven throughout the thesis, informing and complementing each area of inquiry.

For the purposes of this study, a “professional” dancer is understood not solely through consistent financial compensation, but as an individual engaged in dance as a sustained and intentional practice. This may include performance, teaching, choreography, or related forms of labor, as well as ongoing training and creative engagement. Similarly, “career” is not treated as a fixed or linear trajectory, but as an evolving relationship to dance that unfolds over time, shaped by opportunity, access, and individual circumstance.

Alongside interview research, this thesis integrates embodied inquiry through personal practice and performance. Drawing from CounterTechnique principles, Alexander Technique, functional anatomy, and improvisational research, I posit my own dancing body as both subject and site of knowledge. Performance, rehearsal, recovery, and care function as modes of investigation, generating insights that theory alone cannot provide. Rather than separating scholarship from practice, this work treats embodiment as central to understanding longevity in

4. Spry, “Performing Autoethnography,” 710–15.

dance.

These intersecting modes of inquiry—embodiment, performance, and interview—shape the structure of the present work. Early chapters establish context and examine assumptions surrounding aging, professionalism, and the dancing body. Subsequent sections explore the biological realities of physical change, training and choreographic practices, systems of support, and structural barriers, as evidenced through practicum in the form of multiple original works. Later chapters center on representation, personal praxis, and collective wisdom drawn directly from interviewed dancers' voices. The thesis concludes by looking outward, recognizing the need for both individual agency and accountability as well as communal and institutional prioritization of integrated artistry, care, and career sustainability. Potential future work is also considered.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that longevity in dance is not achieved through individual resilience alone. It is made possible—or constrained—by the personal, pedagogical, and institutional systems in which dancers operate. This project does not seek to define a single, one-size-fits-all solution, but rather to explore multiple pathways for prolonging the dance career as a resource to dancers with this goal. By listening closely to dancers' lived experiences and placing them in conversation with embodied practice and institutional frameworks, this project seeks to contribute to a more honest, inclusive, and sustainable understanding of what a dance career can be across a lifetime.

CHAPTER II

Framing the Inquiry

2.1 Literature Review

This section situates the study within existing scholarship on aging in contemporary dance and the evolving understanding of the dancing body over time. Having examined how ideas about age, professionalism, and career stages are culturally formed and sustained, this chapter turns toward the body itself as a primary site of evidence—considering how physical change unfolds over time and how dancers experience that change through practice.

From a biological and medical perspective, there is no single age at which the human body begins to deteriorate. Aging is a gradual, lifelong process that begins after developmental maturity, and functional decline is neither uniform nor inevitable. Different physiological systems peak and shift along distinct timelines—often decades apart—and many age-related changes are shaped more by use, environment, recovery, and behavior than by chronological age alone.¹

At the cellular level, molecular processes such as DNA damage accumulation, telomere shortening, and reduced repair efficiency begin in early adulthood, laying the groundwork for aging long before clinical decline appears. Skeletal muscle mass and maximal strength typically peak in the third decade, with average declines of approximately three to eight percent per decade

1. National Institute on Aging, “What Do We Know About Healthy Aging?,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022, n. pag. Accessed April 12, 2026, <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/healthy-aging/what-do-we-know-about-healthy-aging>.

beginning around ages thirty to forty. Crucially, this process—often described as sarcopenia—remains highly responsive to resistance training and mechanical loading. Bone mineral density similarly peaks in the late twenties to early thirties, with subsequent changes shaped less by chronological age and more by loading patterns, nutrition, and hormonal factors.²

Together, these perspectives begin to outline how aging in dance has been understood across biological, cultural, and performance-based contexts. While biological research provides essential context, dance scholarship increasingly turns toward how these changes are experienced, interpreted, and valued within performance practice.

Within dance scholarship, writing on aging increasingly challenges the dominance of youth-centered virtuosity, proposing instead that the aging body offers distinct modes of perception and performance. Choreographer, writer, and influential postmodern dance figure Yvonne Rainer's reflections on the "aching" body reposition physical limitation as a generative site, where sensation, effort, and decision-making become more visible and more consciously negotiated by the performer.³ Rather than masking fatigue or instability, this perspective invites the dancer to foreground these experiences, shifting the audience's attention toward presence and perceptual depth. Steve Paxton, a central figure in postmodern dance and Contact Improvisation development, shares a similar perspective in his reflections on his own continued practice, noting that the challenges of dancing evolve over time and that aging opens up the possibility of discovering "systems in the body" that had previously gone unnoticed.⁴ In this way, the aging dancer is not understood as declining, but as engaging in an ongoing process of inquiry—one that privileges listening, adaptability, and accumulated embodied knowledge. Together, these perspectives reframe aging not as a limit, but as an expansion of how dancing can be experienced, valued, and understood.

2. Pirkko Markula et al., "'It Can Be Magic:' Creating Age Awareness Through Contemporary Dance," *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living* 4 (2022): 795541.

3. Yvonne Rainer, "The aching body in dance," in *The Aging Body in Dance* (Routledge, 2017), 31–34.

4. Steve Paxton, "How Important Is Dance? (I Think it May be Critical!)," in *The Wise Body: Conversations with Experienced Dancers*, ed. Jacky Lansley and Fergus Early (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2011), 97–98.

Dance is often framed as a young person's profession. Within dominant cultural and structural narratives, professional dance careers are frequently understood as limited in duration, shaped by assumptions about physical decline and the demands of sustained performance.⁵ In her book *Ageing, Gender, Embodiment and Dance: Finding a Balance*, dance scholar and researcher Elisabeth Schwaiger observes that dancers in Western cultures participate in an art form that is simultaneously aesthetic and athletic, one in which "the ageing of the body impact[s] on the subjectivity of the dancer and her or his future in dance much earlier than in many other careers."⁶ These assumptions, Schwaiger argues, are reinforced by broader cultural values within dance that privilege youthfulness, virtuosity, and physical capability.⁷ Within this cultural logic, the dancing body is often expected to be fast, resilient, and endlessly available—qualities commonly associated with youth. As a result, the prospect of dancing into mid- or later life is frequently positioned as exceptional rather than ordinary.

Schwaiger further suggests that dominant discourses of aging can render mature dancing bodies less visible, encouraging narratives in which aging is understood primarily through decline rather than continued artistic development.⁸ Dancers are therefore rarely encouraged to imagine themselves performing into mid- or late-life, and when they do, those trajectories are often accompanied by silence, misinformation, or fear. Yet across studios, stages, and communities, dancers continue to work, create, teach, and perform beyond these presumed endpoints. This tension between dominant expectations and lived experience reveals the need to reconsider how aging is understood within contemporary dance and whose bodies are permitted to remain visible within the field.⁹

Rather than following a linear trajectory, dance careers are often unstable and require

5. Elisabeth Schwaiger, *Ageing, gender, embodiment and dance: Finding a balance* (Springer, 2011), 1–27, 55–58.

6. Schwaiger, *Ageing & dance: balance*, 1.

7. Schwaiger, *Ageing & dance: balance*, 48–49, 55–58.

8. Schwaiger, *Ageing & dance: balance*, 55–58.

9. Schwaiger, *Ageing & dance: balance*, 117–38.

dancers to navigate multiple roles and transitions across time.¹⁰ As a result, recent research has increasingly called attention to dancer wellbeing and the need for more sustainable structures to support longer professional careers.

In contrast to these dominant structures, Schwaiger complicates conventional narratives of transition in a dancer's career by emphasizing the agency of dancers who choose to continue performing beyond normative expectations. Rather than moving toward a fixed endpoint, many dancers pursue less traditional pathways, sustaining their practices through solo work or collaborative processes that allow for ongoing experimentation and development.¹¹ In these contexts, dance forms that are not rigidly codified become particularly significant, as they support the exploration of new movement possibilities in which age is not something to resist, but a parameter to work with. This reframing disrupts the notion of retirement as a definitive threshold, instead positioning the dancing body as engaged in a continuous process of adaptation and redefinition. As Schwaiger suggests, such approaches foreground a level of autonomy that resists dominant social expectations surrounding aging, allowing mature dancers to actively shape their artistic trajectories rather than defer to prescribed timelines.¹² This perspective resonates strongly with my own research, where I am invested in understanding how dancers sustain practice over time by remaining responsive to change, rather than attempting to return to or preserve earlier versions of themselves.

Together, these discussions highlight both the strengths and the limitations of current approaches to understanding aging, professionalism, and sustainability in dance, revealing a need to more clearly define key terms such as “professionalism” within this study. For me, professionalism begins with compensation—being paid for one's work or product. Yet in the dance field, compensation extends beyond direct monetary pay. Many professional dancers

10. Luke S Hopper et al., “Sustaining dancer wellbeing through independent professional dance careers,” *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* 11, no. 4 (2020): 470–86.

11. Schwaiger, *Ageing & dance: balance*, 62–64.

12. Schwaiger, *Ageing & dance: balance*, 74–78.

receive a range of non-financial forms of support that meaningfully contribute to career sustainability. These may include free or reduced-cost training, access to studios, cross-training resources, or wellness support such as physical therapy and conditioning. Dancers may also receive housing or travel stipends during residencies or tours, as well as materials such as costumes, rehearsal space, or high-quality video documentation that can be used for reels and future applications. While these perspectives offer important insight into the aging body, much of this work remains rooted in biological or preventative approaches, leaving space to further explore aging as an embodied, performative, and visible experience within dance practice.

In searching for resources that addressed the realities of being an older dancer, I found myself returning to Daniel Nagrin's *How to Dance Forever*.¹³ Originally encountered during my undergraduate capstone, the text remained striking in its scope upon revisiting it during this research process. Published in 1988, Nagrin's writing is notably comprehensive and forward-thinking, offering both practical insight and a sustained articulation of possibility grounded in his own performance career.

Nagrin reflects on the breadth of his work across decades, including beginning a solo tour at forty, creating an evening-length two-hour work at fifty, dancing with an improvisational company throughout his fifties, and presenting a full concert at the age of sixty-seven. As he writes,

All of this must sound like boasting. Of course it is, but actually it isn't. I'm only describing a possibility—a possibility that has been realized by a sufficient number of dancers to demolish the myth that turning forty is the cue to start looking for an alternative way. It is not given. The myth is powerful and not bending to it calls for a powerful assertion of the will to do and some luck.¹⁴

Nagrin's framing of longevity as both possible and will-driven provides a useful lens for

13. D. Nagrin, *How to Dance Forever: Surviving Against the Odds* (Morrow, 1988), ISBN: 9780688077990.

14. Nagrin, *Dance Forever*, 225.

examining how narratives of aging circulate within dance culture. While such perspectives have been articulated for decades, they continue to sit in tension with dominant structures of visibility and support, where aging dancers are still comparatively underrepresented. Nagrin's text thus serves as both a historical and conceptual anchor for this inquiry, situating longevity not as an exception but as an actively constructed and contested possibility.

2.2 *Creative Landscape*

This section examines how aging is represented within contemporary dance practice, focusing on choreographers, companies, and performance models that engage with dancers across different stages of life. One influential example can be seen in the work of choreographer Pina Bausch, whose company frequently features performers across a wide range of ages. During my undergraduate years and throughout my twenties, I encountered Bausch's work and was struck by the visible diversity of age within her company. The dancers—regardless of age—never appeared out of place or “too old” for the work. I did not question whether they should be performing at that stage in life; instead, I found myself thinking, “Why wouldn't they?” This early exposure expanded my understanding of what a dance career could encompass over time and introduced a sense of possibility that would later inform my own research.

Central to Bausch's choreographic practice is a process rooted in the lived experiences of her dancers. Rather than generating movement from predetermined steps or aesthetic ideals, she developed material through an extensive question-and-response methodology, asking dancers to draw from their memories, emotions, and personal histories. In some cases, this involved posing hundreds of questions—reportedly between 800 and 1,000 during a single creation process—from which she selected and shaped responses into performance material. This approach reflects her well-known assertion that she was “not interested in how people move, but

what moves them,”¹⁵ shifting emphasis away from technical virtuosity toward the expressive and experiential capacities of the performer. Similarly, Bausch emphasized that movement emerges from life rather than formalized technique, reinforcing the idea that personal history is central to performance. In this process, dancers of different ages bring distinct embodied knowledge to the work, enabling multiple generations to coexist on stage and challenging dominant assumptions that privilege youthful bodies in dance.¹⁶

This approach is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in Bausch’s work *Kontakthof*, which has been performed with both teenage dancers and performers over the age of sixty-five, revealing how the same choreographic material is transformed through different bodies and lived experiences over time. Rather than presenting aging as decline, these iterations highlight how gesture, timing, and relational dynamics shift in response to accumulated experience. While the physical vocabulary may remain consistent, the meaning of the movement changes—inflected by memory, history, and the body’s evolving capacities. In this way, Bausch’s work resists fixed hierarchies of value based on age, instead positioning difference across the lifespan as artistically generative.¹⁷

Common to both Pina Bausch’s and Bill T. Jones’s choreographic practices is an emphasis on the dancer’s lived experience as a generative source of movement. Within contemporary dance research, sustaining a professional career requires dancers to continuously navigate physical demands, psychological pressures, and the instability of a largely casualized industry, highlighting how embodiment is not fixed but continually negotiated over time through both artistic practice and lived experience.¹⁸ Rather than positioning the body as a purely technical instrument, this orientation acknowledges the dancer as an evolving subject whose experiences

15. Royd Climenhaga, *Pina Bausch* (Routledge, 2018), 45.

16. Climenhaga, *Pina Bausch*, 44–45.

17. Philippa Kaina, “Pina Bausch’s *Kontakthof*,” *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 210, no. 6 (2017): 383.

18. Maria José Fazenda, “The sorrow and the hope of a dancer: remembering Still/Here twenty-five years after the première of Bill T. Jones’ dance piece,” *Etnográfica. Revista do Centro em Rede de Investigação em Antropologia* 25, no. 2 (2021): 493–4.

accumulate across a career. Bausch's process aligns with this understanding by drawing movement from dancers' personal histories and emotional experiences, while Jones similarly situates choreography within lived and biographical contexts. In his evening length choreographic work *Still/Here*, for example, Jones develops material through workshops with participants facing life-threatening illness, integrating their testimonies and embodied experiences into the choreographic work.¹⁹ Across both practices, the body emerges as a repository of memory and experience—continually shaped by time, identity, and circumstance. This reorientation toward experience-rich embodiment challenges dominant dance paradigms that privilege youthful virtuosity, instead opening space for older dancers to be understood not as diminished bodies, but as carriers of accumulated knowledge and meaning.

Exemplifying this shift in perspective, freelance dance artist Emily Hansel, who has spent the past decade working across contemporary and experimental concert dance contexts, emphasizes the importance of encountering diverse models for longevity within the field:

Find the models for it . . . that was something that I was lucky to stumble into because of the programming that's around me. Everyone is doing that in different ways. All of the models that I have, who are dancers who are 50 years or older, have their own unique trajectory. So that's so reassuring that I will be unique in mine, if that's what I want when the time comes.²⁰

Beyond this example, contemporary dance practices increasingly include inter-generational casting and collaborative models that value lived experience alongside technical virtuosity. While these approaches begin to expand how aging is represented on stage, they also reveal an opportunity to further investigate how visibility, embodiment, and lived experience function within performance as research. These creative practices challenge dominant assumptions about age and value in dance, yet they remain relatively limited in scope. As a result, there is a

19. Fazenda, "Remembering *Still/Here*," 493–5.

20. Emily Hansel, Dancer, Freelance, *Interview by author*, February 2026.

continued need to explore how aging, visibility, and performance intersect within lived practice, particularly in ways that foreground the experiences of dancers themselves.

CHAPTER III

The Body as Evidence: Aging, Injury, and Adaptation

The present research combines two approaches: a performance-as-research practice of my own and a series of qualitative interviews. While my own embodied practice serves as a primary site of investigation—allowing me to explore questions of sustainability and longevity through movement and lived experience—the interview process expands this inquiry by centering the voices of other dancers. In particular, I was interested in speaking with individuals whose experiences may not always be visible or widely represented within dominant dance narratives, creating space for a broader range of perspectives to emerge. Together, these approaches support a more relational understanding of dance practice, one that moves between individual embodiment and collective experience.

Throughout my dance career, I have been exposed to a range of improvisational practices that have shaped how I approach both movement and inquiry. Improvisation in dance is commonly understood as the practice of generating movement in real time, often without predetermined choreography, and grounded in the dancer's embodied awareness and responsiveness.¹ While sometimes associated with spontaneity, improvisation is not without structure; rather, it draws on accumulated technical skill, perception, and decision-making processes that allow dancers to create, adapt, and respond within unfolding movement situations.² I have engaged with improvisation in workshops, formal coursework at the undergraduate and

1. Curtis L Carter, "Improvisation in dance," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58, no. 2 (2000): 181–90.

2. Vida L Midgelow, *The Oxford handbook of improvisation in dance* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 1–5.

graduate levels, contact improvisation jams, and as a tool for generating material in collaborative and company-based settings. These experiences have informed not only how I move but also how I listen, respond, and make decisions in real time.

In the context of this research, improvisation became a methodological paradigm, shaping how I approached interviews as open, responsive exchanges rather than fixed or predetermined interactions. This approach aligns with scholarship that positions improvisation as a practice capable of accommodating the changing body over time. As Martin observes, many dancers who developed improvisation as both a compositional and performance practice in the 1960's continue to perform into their seventies and beyond, suggesting that these practices allow for ongoing adaptation and exploration rather than adherence to a fixed ideal of the dancing body.³ In this way, improvisation offers a model of practice that resists static notions of virtuosity and age, instead supporting a sustained engagement with dance as an evolving, lived process. Incorporating this perspective into my research allowed me to remain attentive to change, uncertainty, and emergence, both in the interviews and in my broader understanding of sustainability within dance.

As I began designing the interview process, I was immediately confronted with assumptions embedded in my own questions. The opening prompt—"How long have you been dancing professionally?"—often elicited a pause, followed by some variation of: "It depends on what you mean by professional, doesn't it?" These responses revealed how fluid, contextual, and contested the notion of professionalism can be within the dance field. I realized that I was entering these conversations with a presumed understanding rather than allowing participants to define their experiences on their own terms. This early moment of friction prompted a broader re-examination of how language frames—and sometimes limits—what we think we are asking. It also made visible how definitions around career, legitimacy, and sustainability shift across different life stages, roles, and contexts. Rather than correcting these responses or narrowing the question, I began to listen more closely to what dancers brought forward, allowing their

3. Martin, *Dancing Age(ing)*, 20–21.

interpretations to shape the direction of the inquiry.

Initially, I planned to interview dancers aged thirty and older, operating under the assumption that longevity could only be meaningfully discussed after a certain threshold of experience. This criterion was later revealed as both limiting and contradictory. An unexpected turning point emerged during a conversation with an undergraduate student about my thesis topic, which led me to realize that by excluding early-career dancers, I was inadvertently reproducing the very age-based assumptions I hoped to question. I began to consider how beliefs about career length take shape far earlier than mid-career-often during training-and how those beliefs influence dancers' expectations long before longevity becomes a lived concern.

This recognition expanded the scope of the research and reshaped my understanding of career stages themselves. Rather than treating "early-," "mid-," and "late-career" as fixed categories tied to age, I began to see them as relational and contextual, shaped by opportunity, access, and the cumulative rhythms of a dancer's working life. Narrow age-based constructs, in this sense, can obscure the complexity of lived dance careers.

As interviews progressed, it became clear that a rigid questionnaire could not adequately respond to the diversity of dancers' experiences. While I began with a structured set of eighteen questions grouped around demographics, sustainability, support systems, artistic identity, accessibility, and industry change, the conversations quickly demanded a more flexible approach. Patterns, tensions, and unexpected reflections emerged that required me to adapt questions in real time and follow lines of inquiry introduced by the participants themselves.

One such example involved dancers' perceptions of career length. Several early interviews revealed a shared belief-often absorbed during training-that a dance career typically ends around age thirty-five. Hearing this assumption echoed across conversations led me to introduce follow-up questions mid-process, exploring how such assumptions formed, whether they shifted over time, and what factors contributed to changing expectations. These additions opened space

for more nuanced discussions around perception, experience, and the realities dancers encounter as they age.

The call for interviews was distributed through professional networks, faculty referrals, direct outreach, and social media. Twenty-four respondents ranged in age from their late twenties to early seventies and represented a wide spectrum of professional contexts. Interviews were conducted in person, via Zoom, and through written or video submissions. While the length and format of each conversation varied, participants engaged generously and thoughtfully across modalities, often extending beyond the initial prompts into deeper, unanticipated reflections.

Throughout this process, responsiveness became a guiding principle. Allowing the research to evolve-rather than forcing it into a predetermined structure- reinforced themes that would later emerge more fully across the interviews. This approach foregrounded listening, adaptability, and relational exchange as essential not only to the research process itself, but also to the broader questions of sustainability and longevity that this thesis seeks to explore.

CHAPTER IV

Practicum: Emergent Patterns Supporting Longevity

4.1 Personal Praxis: Practicing Sustainability from the Inside

This chapter centers performance-as-research as a primary mode of inquiry, positioning embodied practice and improvisation as methods for investigating aging, visibility, and sustainability in dance. As a forty-six-year-old artist who remains deeply connected to performing, entering my third decade as a professional dancer as defined in chapter one, it has become increasingly important for me to investigate what it means to sustain a dance career beyond the field's traditional expectations. Personal practice has always been central to my ability to continue working, and this research has prompted me to examine more intentionally the tools, frameworks, and resources that have supported my longevity.

In my practice, CounterTechnique – a contemporary dance methodology founded and developed by choreographer Anouk van Dijk – operates as a way of organizing attention rather than prescribing form. What I value in the system, as articulated through van Dijk's work, is its emphasis on using direction and counterdirection to create a constant state of dynamic balance, allowing the body to remain responsive rather than fixed around a single center.¹ Instead of working toward an ideal shape, I experience the technique as a process of continuously

1. I. Diehl, F. Lampert, and Tanzplan Deutschland (Project), *Dance Techniques 2010: Tanzplan Germany*, Dance Techniques 2010: Tanzplan Germany, v. 1-2 (Henschel, 2011), 74, ISBN: 9783894876890, <https://books.google.com/books?id=qUb.XwAACAAJ>.

adjusting—redistributing weight, redirecting energy, and making choices in real time. The idea of a “toolbox” becomes especially useful here, not as a set of corrections, but as a collection of options that support autonomy and adaptability.² This shifts technique toward something more sustainable: a practice where effort can be reorganized, momentum can be leveraged, and the dancer is actively engaged in problem-solving rather than obedience. In this way, CounterTechnique aligns closely with my broader interest in cultivating efficiency, longevity, and a more conversational relationship between thinking and moving.

Throughout my career—particularly during moments when I questioned whether I wanted to continue-CounterTechnique has remained a grounding force. My understanding of this methodology shifted significantly through my participation in One Body, One Career (OBOC), an intensive designed to support dancers through sustainable practices across the full arc of a professional life. Structured as a space for inquiry rather than correction, OBOC integrates technique, anatomy, reflection, and dialogue to address how dancers train, recover, and adapt over time. The intensive frames longevity not as the preservation of youth, but as an ongoing negotiation with change, efficiency, and care.

Similar perspectives along the ideas of sustainability and autonomy emerged in interview responses, particularly around the role of control and choice in shaping a long-term practice. For example, one of my interviewees, dance artist and University of Oklahoma professor Austin Hartel, a former performer with Pilobolus who later directed his own companies and now serves as artistic director of the Oklahoma International Dance Festival, and who continued performing into his forties and fifties, reflected:

As long as you want to perform, control the process, or stay physically in the shape that you need to be in to perform someone else’s work and to be a part of their process. If you are the creator, you know the what, where, when and how, and then you fit yourself into it . . . While this isn’t always possible, but if you can control the

2. Diehl, Lampert, and (Project), *Dance Techniques*, 67–68, 72.

process, that's going to give you the ability to keep doing what you want to do and how you want to do it, because you're in control of that process.³

Participating in OBOC clarified for me how deeply training philosophies shape not only movement patterns, but also expectations around productivity, rest, and permission. One particular iteration, guided by CounterTechnique(CT) founder Anouk van Dijk, CT Master Teacher Nina Wollny, and CT Senior Teacher Niharika Senapati, offered profound insights into anatomy, efficiency, and embodied awareness. Anatomy sessions are a frequent component of CounterTechnique workshops, but Wollny's teaching in particular provided in-depth explorations that reshaped how I understood my own body. Through these sessions, I realized that aspects of my earlier training were incomplete or misinterpreted, and that these misunderstandings had, at times, contributed to injury.

Another major influence on my longevity has been the Alexander Technique, a somatic practice that focuses on cultivating awareness, reducing habitual tension, and improving coordination in movement. This approach is also embedded within the foundation of CounterTechnique. I recall Anouk van Dijk discussing the significant role the Alexander Technique played in shaping CounterTechnique, particularly in its emphasis on awareness, the release of unnecessary tension, and the reorganization of effort. As Alexander Technique teacher, practitioner, and author Michael J. Gelb explains, "Alexander Technique does not involve doing anything new, at least as we usually understand doing. It is a process of stripping away the things we have imposed on ourselves so that the organism can work naturally and our reason can function without distraction."⁴ Rather than prescribing corrective exercises, it emphasizes noticing how effort is organized and making conscious choices that support ease, efficiency, and responsiveness.⁵

3. Austin Hartel, Artistic Director, Oklahoma International Dance Festival, Associate Professor of Dance, University of Oklahoma, *Interview by author*, March 2026.

4. Michael J Gelb, *Body Learning:: An Introduction to the Alexander Technique* (Aurum, 2013), 60.

5. Gelb, *Body Learning*, 59–67.

For me, this practice fundamentally shifted how I relate to both movement and rest—particularly during long days of rehearsal, teaching, and performance. Concepts such as allowing, inhibition, and direction offered practical tools for interrupting overexertion and clarifying intention, directly supporting my capacity to sustain work over time and navigate periods of injury. Learning to use my body more efficiently in everyday movement made a significant difference, especially during phases of my career when days regularly stretched twelve to fourteen hours. In particular, the concept of inhibition became a key tool for pausing habitual responses and creating more intentional choices. As Gelb clarifies,

Alexanderian inhibition is not to be confused with the Freudian concept. Freud’s use of the term refers to the suppression of an instinctive desire by the super-ego.

Alexander’s concept is a matter of common sense—‘stop, look, and listen.’ What Alexander did was translate this advice into a practical technique based on the natural functioning of the organism.⁶

The concept of end-gaining—a core principle within the Alexander Technique—proved especially influential. End-gaining refers to the tendency to prioritize outcomes over the processes required to reach them. “Each of us is so complex that we must carefully reason the means we employ to reach any goal. Alexander found that most of us let our immediate goals dominate the field of our attention; he called this ‘end-gaining’ or the ‘one brain track’ method.”⁷

In my training and professional life, this often manifested as pushing toward an expectation without attending to how I was organizing myself in the moment. Learning to notice and interrupt end-gaining allowed me to shift attention back to movement quality, choice-making, and effort along the way. This reframing reinforced the idea that longevity depends not on forcing outcomes, but on maintaining clarity and responsiveness within process.

One of the most valuable tools I have gained through CounterTechnique is the practice of

6. Gelb, *Body Learning*, 59.

7. Gelb, *Body Learning*, 80.

giving myself permission—permission to do something, or permission not to do something. This approach allows me to remain present with what is actually happening in my body in real time. Rather than forcing a predetermined idea of what movement “should” be, I can navigate based on sensation, energy, and capacity. This sense of agency has been critical to sustaining a long career.

Additional resources have also played an important role in my ongoing longevity. One of the most impactful has been the Essential Anatomy 5 app, which I first encountered through Nina Wollny. Its three-dimensional, rotatable models and layered breakdowns deepened my understanding of functional anatomy in ways no static text had previously offered. The ability to isolate structures, shift perspectives, and turn the body in space provides clarity that supports both my teaching and embodied practice. I use the app regularly in classes I lead to facilitate brief anatomy discussions, and this integration has noticeably influenced how I dance and understand movement mechanics.

Expanding my knowledge of functional anatomy, biomechanics, and physics has further shaped how I work. Understanding forces acting on the body, pathways of movement, and the mechanics of effort has strengthened my ability to use my instrument efficiently across different stages of my career. This knowledge supports not only performance but also recovery, adaptation, and long-term sustainability.

Deepening my study of the Alexander Technique through classes and private sessions has reinforced these shifts. I have become increasingly aware of habitual patterns both in and out of the studio. Even small observations—such as noticing which leg I habitually cross while sitting—can reveal long-standing asymmetries. By attending to unnecessary tension and questioning whether I am engaging muscles I do not need, I am able to redirect toward more efficient use and improved long-term health.

Equally important has been the development of a care team over the past two years. Working with practitioners such as a licensed massage therapist specializing in myofascial

release, cupping, and corrective modalities, a physical therapist with experience working closely with dancers, and a physician specializing in sports medicine has supported my physical and mental well-being. This team provides a range of coordinated support that contributes directly to sustaining long-term practice, from injury prevention and rehabilitation to ongoing maintenance and performance readiness. While living in San Francisco, my care network also included primary care, psychiatric support, cognitive therapy, and interdisciplinary clinical services, all of which contributed to maintaining balance during demanding performance periods. This holistic approach to care reinforced the understanding that long-term sustainability in dance depends not only on physical maintenance, but also on psychological support, rest, and overall well-being.

Recovery has become an active and essential component of my practice rather than something reserved for moments of injury or exhaustion. Over time, I have come to understand recovery as a form of training in itself—one that allows the body to integrate work, restore capacity, and adapt. Practices such as meditation, acupressure mat work, foam rolling, self-myofascial release, heat and ice applications, Epsom-salt baths, and tools such as massage balls, compression gear, and massage guns have supported this process. Prioritizing recovery has shifted how I approach effort, reinforcing the understanding that rest is not an absence of work, but a crucial condition for sustaining it.

Above all, I have learned that longevity is not achieved through a single method, but through an evolving combination of awareness, inquiry, support, recovery, and embodied curiosity. This integrated approach continues to shape how I practice, perform, teach, and envision what remains possible.

4.2 When Movement Repeats: Choreographic Wear & Bilateral Awareness

Building on the embodied realities of aging and adaptation explored in the previous chapter, this section considers how choreography and training practices accumulate in dancers’

bodies over time. My recent research has prompted me to think more closely about aspects of bodily use that are not always foregrounded within contemporary dance training and rehearsal processes—particularly the long term impact of repetition and asymmetry.

A significant moment of appreciation for symmetrical consideration occurred while listening to Anouk van Dijk describe the intentional structure of CounterTechnique classes, to conclude with equal movement on both sides of the body expressly for this reason. The class is purposefully designed to prepare the body for rehearsal and performance, consistently addressing both the right and left sides of the body as a foundational principle.

As I continue to age as a performer, I have become increasingly aware of the physical impact of repetitive choreography—especially the imbalances that emerge when movement material is practiced or performed predominantly on one side of the body. These asymmetries accumulate over time, raising questions about how unilateral movement patterns may contribute to long-term strain, wear, or breakdown in dancers’ bodies. This curiosity led me to investigate whether more balanced or sustainable approaches might be incorporated into creative and rehearsal processes.

This line of inquiry became a central influence in the evening-length work *It’s About Time*, which I presented in December 2024 at the University of Oklahoma. The work was staged in the round, with the performing space arranged like a clock. Throughout the performance, the audience rotated around the perimeter, experiencing multiple perspectives and orientations to the choreography. Structurally, the piece unfolded twice from beginning to end. During the second cycle, the dancers performed the entire sequence on the opposite side of the body, accompanied by different music. While my initial intention was to fully reverse all material—including partnering—time constraints ultimately made it unsafe to prepare certain lifts on both sides within the rehearsal period, as a fitting example of such practical forces often working in opposition to the goals of this research.

Unexpectedly, this structural choice resonated deeply with the conceptual themes of the work. Conversations with audience members afterward revealed a compelling mix of recognition and disorientation. Several viewers noted a sense of familiarity, yet because they were seated in entirely different locations during the second run, they questioned whether they were truly seeing the same material. One audience member described the experience as “refreshing to feel a sense of familiarity but from a completely different vantage point and tone,” underscoring how shifts in orientation, perspective, and musical context transformed perception.

As these questions about repetition and bodily sustainability expanded, they began to intersect with themes that surfaced consistently throughout the interview process—particularly around cross-training, bodily awareness, and long-term care. Because I was not performing in the work myself, I became especially interested in how this bilateral approach impacted the dancers over time. From the outset, I intentionally dedicated rehearsal time to exploring movement material on both sides of the body, knowing that this dual-sidedness was integral to the choreographic structure. Moving forward, I am interested in continuing to investigate several potential methodologies that could support greater balance, conditioning, and long-term well-being for dancers:

A. Split-Side Rehearsal Structure In this model, rehearsal time is divided evenly between side A and side B, ensuring balanced muscular engagement and equal conditioning of both sides of the body within the choreography.

B. A Mindful Choreographic Approach Here, the choreographer generates movement with the conscious intention that if an action occurs on one side of the body, a related movement—either mirrored or conceptually parallel—is developed for the other. This approach does not require perfect symmetry and may not be appropriate for all works, but it introduces deliberate awareness of bilateral use and may appeal to choreographers drawn to complex problem-solving within the creative process.

C. End-of-Rehearsal Cross-Training This approach involves designating an individual with anatomical or conditioning expertise to observe the day's rehearsal and identify which muscle groups or movement patterns were predominantly used. In the final ten to fifteen minutes of rehearsal, they would lead a brief conditioning sequence targeting underused or counterbalancing patterns. This method requires both bodily awareness and the ability to generate responsive conditioning material in real time.

Over the course of setting and presenting this work, I found many of the discoveries and conclusions I was drawing were reflected in survey responses, echoing themes of collaborative force and communication in creation discussed in later chapters. These dynamics become essential for healthy and constructive creative spaces, as reinforced by insights from interviewed artists working across a range of contemporary dance contexts.

San Francisco-based contemporary dance artist, choreographer, and educator Charles Slender-White, Artistic Director of FACT/SF and CT certified teacher, reflects on the broader relationship between dancing and lived experience:

Know why you dance, and what dance brings into your life. Know, also that might change over time and that's okay. Dancing isn't just about your body and what your body can or can't do. Dancing exists in the context of your entire life and requires that context to help make the dancing possible. A lot of older dancers share stories about how their bodies feel and nostalgia about dance moves they could do in the past but can no longer manage. Some of their stories might apply to you, and some might not. Listen with compassion and empathy . . . About performing in particular . . . do it if it brings you pleasure and adds value to your life. Stop doing it if it doesn't.⁸

Similarly emphasizing reciprocity and sustainability within dance practice, Oklahoma-based dance artist and educator Hui Cha Poos, whose career spans concert dance,

8. Charles Slender-White, Founder & Artistic Director, FACT/sf, Certified CounterTechnique Teacher, *Interview by author*, February 2026.

commercial performance, and musical theatre, and who is the founder of RACE Dance Collective, points to the importance of exchange and care:

Give as much as you are taking. Because, like with anything, the gift, say I'm giving to you, and you are receiving it, it is actually something that I'm receiving as well ... so it's a two-way street. That could mean monetarily, or that could mean using dance as a service. ... I also think it's just as important to gift [dance]. Because that is a long-lasting benefit. Giving truly is healing.⁹

Extending this ethos of mutual support and collective responsibility, performer and educator Nina Wollny, the German-born dance artist and CT master teacher instrumental in my own development, whose practice centers on anatomical awareness and embodied inquiry, underscores the role of community in sustaining the field:

Have love for yourself and have love for others. Have love and respect for the world. There is something in that that is super powerful, and in the end, all the things I'm speaking about is that. There is something big when there is support for each other ... you're not just making dance, but you are also together bringing the dance field forward. Don't put out your elbows ... put out your arms like you are holding hands, or supporting, or hugging. And if you truly, really go into all that, then you can just GO.¹⁰

These reflections reinforce the idea that sustainability is not defined by a single method, but by an ongoing process of listening, adapting, and re-evaluating one's relationship to dance over time. Across these perspectives, there is a shared emphasis on self-awareness, care, and the understanding that both the body and one's connection to practice will continue to evolve.

9. Hui Cha Poos, Founder RACE Dance Collective, Faculty University of Central Oklahoma (full time), University of Oklahoma (adjunct), *Interview by author*, February 2026.

10. Nina Wollny, CounterTechnique Master Teacher, Dancer, Freelance, *Interview by author*, February 2026.

4.3 *Performance Research: Improvisation, Visibility, Endurance, and Witnessing*

As someone who is deeply invested in practicing what I preach, it felt important for me to be actively inside both the creative process and the performance itself during the period of my research and interviews. This positioning required me to step aside at times and ask myself difficult and necessary questions, an inquiry that carried into the *Can You See Me Now...* performance itself, where many of the central questions driving this research were articulated directly.

At the beginning of the piece, a prerecorded text in my own voice was layered over music and served as an opening invocation, drawing the audience's attention toward issues of visibility, aging, courage, failure, and the act of being witnessed, while also setting the tone for the improvisational processes that followed:

What does it mean . . .
to be seen?
Not just looked at.
Not just noticed.
But seen.
There is a difference.
There are things we see with our eyes—
sitting high, looking out.
And there are things we see with our hearts—
sitting still, looking in.
Can you see me now?
How about now?
A dancer, if they are great,
can give something that stays with you forever.
You carry it.
It changes you.
Even if you never know why.
But what happens when the body changes?
When the lines soften,

when the jumps lower,
when the silence between movements grows longer?
Is it still dance?
Is it still seen ?
Because their bodies are not young,
older performers carry something
between this world and the next.
That, too, is art.
That, too, is transcendence.
If I'm moving and no one is watching—
is it still dance? What if I close my own eyes?
There's magic in being seen
by people who understand.
It gives you permission
to keep going.
To stay in it.
If your heart is there—
stay in it.
Learning is a gift.
Even when we fall.
Even when we fail.
We are still learning.
So we dive in.
Into the deep end.
And see what happens.
Because courage starts
with showing up.
And letting ourselves be seen.
And once you get past the fear of being seen—
you get to the part
where you know
you are not alone.¹¹

Following this opening invocation, the performance positioned the audience not as passive observers, but as witnesses whose presence and perception actively shaped the experience. The text articulated my own stakes as a performer navigating aging, endurance, and the continued

11. Meegan Hertensteiner, *Can You See Me Now ... How 'Bout Now?*, Performance Documentation (University of Oklahoma, 2025), <https://vimeo.com/1160637350/0d201cfcfb>.

desire to make and share work, while also inviting the audience into a shared ethical space of attention, care, and witnessing.

With this framing in place, I identified several guiding intentions for the work. First, I wanted to examine what it means to be seen—and perceived—as an older dancer, particularly within a field that often privileges youth, speed, and virtuosity. Second, I needed the structure of the work to accommodate the layered demands of graduate school life, including teaching, coursework, employment outside the institution, family responsibilities, rehearsal, performance, thesis writing, scheduling, and securing studio space. Given these realities, I relied heavily on improvisational methods as a way to access what was available in each moment while remaining responsive to the evolving needs of the work and the audience.

I was also interested in pushing my own comfort zone and personal boundaries. This led me to develop a solo-focused work with a minimum duration of one hour, motivated by curiosity about whether I could cultivate the physical, perceptual, and relational endurance required to sustain audience engagement over time. In addition, I explored the concept of “splash zone” seating, in which audience members seated in designated areas consented in advance to the possibility of physical interaction. This choice foregrounded questions of proximity, trust, agency, and consent, extending the inquiry of visibility beyond visual perception alone.

Another central interest involved examining different stages of a dance career. This led to the inclusion of sections featuring planted audience members representing distinct points along a professional lifespan. These moments functioned as subtle temporal markers within the work, drawing attention to continuity, change, and accumulated experience rather than linear progression or decline.

Several sections of the performance included crafted material that was repeated across showings, including one section performed with two undergraduate seniors and another with my long-term dance partner, with whom I have been dancing since 2001. While these sections were

repeatable, the movement material itself was generated through improvisational prompts and collaborative experimentation, shaped by what best served each individual body. The remainder of the performance was fully improvised, allowing the work to remain responsive, contingent, and alive to the specific conditions of each performance.

In one section created with two mid-career dancers, we worked within a contact improvisation structure known as Pentamode. Developed by performer and improvisation artist Brandin Steffensen,¹² Pentamode is a framework designed to explore five relational modes within movement interaction.¹³ The structure provides a shared vocabulary for organizing attention, weight sharing, and decision-making in improvised movement, supporting dancers in shifting fluidly between listening, initiating, responding, and yielding. Rather than attempting to control or resolve the improvisation, the structure functioned as a score that supported ongoing listening and adaptation, allowing the work to unfold without forcing a predetermined outcome.

This approach resonated strongly back with Martin's assertion that "improvisation is invested in exploring an ever-changing, always age(ing), embodied self that is not fixed to notions of a physical and/or artistic peak."¹⁴ Holding this perspective allowed me to release self-critique and instead cultivate a heightened attentiveness—an expansive listening that extended beyond technique or execution. I began to think of this state as a kind of "seventh sense," a perceptual openness that supported sustained presence, responsiveness, and relational awareness.

This commitment to listening and perception culminated in the final section of the piece preceding the closing text. After dancing with another artist, I moved into an improvised solo in which I blindfolded myself and entered the center of the audience, who were seated in a circle around me. This section focused on the experience of being seen without the ability to

12. *Brandin Steffensen*, Artist Profile and Performance Records, Accessed: June 15, 2026, New Museum Digital Archive, 2024, n. pag. <https://archive.newmuseum.org/people/4358>.

13. Brandin Steffensen, *Pentamodal Duet*, Print handout with diagrams; copy in possession of author (Workshop instructional packet distributed in person, 2022), n. pag.

14. Martin, *Dancing Age(ing)*, 20–21.

see—relinquishing visual control while remaining physically, emotionally, and relationally present. When I removed the blindfold, I continued improvising with an intensified awareness of both those around me and my own movement, allowing vision to return not as dominance, but as reciprocity.

The closing spoken text extended this inquiry beyond the performance itself, shifting from invocation toward reflection. Rather than opening the work, it functioned as an accumulation of questions—offered to the audience as an invitation to consider visibility, value, time, and witnessing not only within the performance, but beyond it.

What does it mean to be seen,
not just with the eyes—but with the soul?
If no one is watching,
does the movement still matter?
Can we ever truly see another person—
or only reflections of ourselves?
Is aging a loss of visibility,
or a shift in what is worth seeing?
What do we carry in our bodies
that words cannot express?
When we witness someone fully,
do we change them—or do they change us?
Is being seen a right,
a privilege,
or a risk?
Can you see me now?
How bout now?
What if the most powerful performances are the ones no one sees?
How do we learn to see,
with more than just our eyes?
Is dance something we do,
or something we are?
Can dance live in stillness,
in memory,
in the way we carry ourselves through the world?
How does time shape dance,
Is a dance less valuable because it is slower, quieter, or more

internal?
Can dance be a form of witnessing,
of seeing and being seen—not just by others, but of ourselves?
What remains when the spotlight fades?
Can you see me now?
How bout now?¹⁵

This performance functioned as both embodied research and lived inquiry, making visible how questions of longevity, permission, and representation can be explored not only through analysis but through sustained presence, risk, and relational exchange. Audience responses highlighted the impact of moments where performance was intentionally withheld as well as moments of heightened proximity and interaction. In one early section, following the opening text, the space was left without dancing for the duration of a full musical track, allowing the audience to sit with what had just been spoken and to become aware of their surroundings and one another. One audience member reflected on this as particularly striking, describing how they began looking around the space in an attempt to make eye contact and be witnessed by others, only to notice how frequently people averted their gaze. When another audience member met their eyes, the brief exchange—and shared smile—created a moment of unexpected connection that lingered long after the performance.

These dynamics extended into sections of the work that involved close physical proximity and, at times, direct contact with audience members. Throughout the performance, I moved into and through the seated audience, occasionally resting my weight across someone's lap, passing underneath a chair, or navigating the space between bodies. In some instances, I initiated small adjustments, such as uncrossing and recrossing an audience member's legs, actions that were subtle yet perceptible, and which brought attention to questions of consent, trust, and shared presence. These interactions disrupted the boundary between performer and viewer, transforming spectatorship into participation and emphasizing the reciprocal nature of witnessing. In these

15. Hertensteiner, *Can You See Me Now*.

moments, visibility was no longer one directional, but negotiated collectively through touch, attention, and awareness.

From my perspective as the performer, the use of a structured improvisational score played a significant role in shaping the depth of engagement possible within the work. Rather than focusing on executing predetermined material, I was able to remain present with the task at hand, allowing the meaning of each section to evolve in real time. This created a sense of freedom from self-judgment and facilitated a more direct connection to the embodied experience I was attempting to communicate. It also allowed me to respond to the shifting conditions of the performance—physically, emotionally, and relationally—remaining attuned to what my body was capable of in each moment. In this way, the process reaffirmed improvisation not only as a compositional tool, but as a method for sustaining presence, adaptability, and authenticity within performance.

CHAPTER V

Interviews: Factors Supporting Longevity

Stepping back from individual practices, the interview research revealed several overlapping factors that consistently supported dancers in sustaining long-term careers. Rather than emerging as isolated strategies, these elements appeared in relation to one another, shaping how dancers navigated change, uncertainty, and long-term engagement with their work. Three general categories of factors became apparent: Mindset & Mental Health, Physical Conditioning & Maintenance, and Support Structures.

5.1 Mindset & Mental Health

Across interviews, mindset emerged as a recurring and influential theme. For many participants, dance was described not simply as a profession or training practice, but as a primary mode of expression—a way of processing emotion, experience, and identity. Many dancers described reaching a point where external validation or the need to impress others became less central to their sense of purpose. Instead, participants emphasized belief in their own path, self-direction, and a willingness to redefine expectations over time. This orientation influenced how dancers understood both the rewards and demands of sustaining a career. The emphasis on intrinsic motivation and personal truth was reflected across multiple perspectives shared in the interview process. San Francisco-based choreographer and performer Deborah Slater, who

founded her own dance theater company and continues to perform in her work, describes dance as an essential mode of communication and self-discovery:

... ‘you have to have to do it’ ... it’s not like, ‘oh, that looks like fun’. It has to be the way that you communicate in the world. It has to be something that you must do. Because it is way too difficult to do. ... There’s also a level of exposure and vulnerability that you must be prepared to face if you’re going to be an artist. You have to tell the truth, I think. ... in some ways I feel like I learn more about myself by being on stage than by just sitting and thinking about things. That’s when I find out what I’ve really been thinking and what I’m emotionally experiencing. It’s an enormous gift to be able to do this as a career, and also extremely challenging in this world ... so you will get more than you could imagine and it will be very hard in the process ...¹

Echoing the importance of belief and forward momentum, freelance Oklahoma-based dancer Brinney Mahmood offers a succinct perspective on self-trust:

Just go for it and do it! Believe in yourself-the power of belief is huge and you have got to believe in yourself. Live your life with no regrets!²

Similarly, drawing from decades of experience, LizAnne Roman Roberts, a long-time company member of FACT/SF and freelance dance artist for over two and a half decades, now in her forties and a certified Pilates instructor, reflects on shifting internal narratives:

Be comfortable with who you are, and listen to what you are saying to yourself. The frequency or the types of progress you encounter might change. Do not be intimidated by what your 14-year-old self thinks about what your career looks like now. What ‘YOU’ right now, where you are standing, wants to make of what

1. Deborah Slater, Founder / Director, Deborah Slater Dance Theater, *Interview by author*, February 2026.
2. Brinney Mahmood, Dancer, Freelance, *Interview by author*, January 2026.

dance is in your life is 100% OK, because that feeds everything else that your life is. And your life as it is now feeds the dance.³

Extending this perspective, Gildas Lemonnier, who performed with the Martha Graham Dance Company, worked as a freelance artist in New York City, and is now on faculty at the University of Oklahoma and the University of Central Oklahoma while continuing to perform, highlights adaptability, bodily awareness, and the evolving meaning of dance across a lifetime:

You can do it ... anything is possible! ... remain in conversation with your body to understand what it needs. Whatever that means for you. Find a routine that fulfills your body's needs to keep it healthy and able to achieve what you are asking of it. Be open to the fact that what dancing and performing means to you can change. ... It might be less physically demanding but it doesn't mean that it's lesser. I think sustaining a dance career as we get older requires honesty with ourselves, about what we can and cannot do, about what we want and maybe what we don't want to do anymore. Being clear about what dance means to you in the present moment, which might be different from what it meant a few years ago. This makes and creates space for different types of dancing and expressions, as well as representation for all ages and bodies. Dance is not about being young, it is about being human; it's not about being entertaining only, it's about expressing yourself. Aging doesn't have to mean lesser - it might mean doing things differently, but it is not lesser.⁴

These perspectives reflect a broader shift away from fixed career narratives and toward self-defined trajectories, where sustainability is shaped through evolving self-awareness and relationships to identity, work, and expectation. Rather than adhering to linear models of success—often tied to youth, virtuosity, or institutional validation—dancers describe a more fluid

3. Lizanne Roman Roberts, Dancer, FACT/sf, Mark Foehringer Dance Company, *Interview by author*, February 2026.

4. Gildas Lemonnier, Associate Professor of Dance, University of Oklahoma, *Interview by author*, February 2026.

understanding of career longevity, one that accommodates change, adaptation, and personal redefinition. In this context, sustainability is not a static goal to be achieved, but an ongoing negotiation that responds to both internal shifts and external conditions.

A commitment to ongoing learning and adaptability also surfaced consistently across interviews. One anonymous freelance dancer with over three decades of professional experience across multiple geographic contexts, who remains actively performing, emphasizes openness and curiosity as central to sustaining a long-term practice:

Go to so many different classes, even within dance, and don't cut yourself off just 'cause you know you love this one thing. Go to classes and sit in the hallway and talk to people. If you're in a place where you can try different things, try them all! Or just dance around your room . . . There's always room for movement.⁵

Expanding on this idea of persistence and continued growth, dancer and choreographer Derek Harris, a mid-career freelance artist who spent over a decade working in the San Francisco Bay Area, co-founded the experimental dance theatre company Human Creature Dance Theatre in 2008, and continues to perform and create work, reflects on the importance of returning to practice over time:

Keep going. Keep showing up. Step away as many times as you want, but keep coming back. We need dance more than it needs us. Dance, as an art form, is ephemeral and unforgiving. Figure out what makes you unique and bring that into what you do. Don't think that you know everything. Continue to learn and grow.⁶

Similarly highlighting curiosity and diversification, San Francisco-based, award-winning dancer, choreographer, and teacher Nol Simonse, who has worked in the Bay Area since the late 1990s and is a longtime collaborator across the contemporary dance community, underscores the value of exploring a wide range of influences:

5. Anonymous, Dancer, Freelance, *Interview by author*, February 2026.

6. Derek Harris, Co-Founder / Co-Director, Human Creature Dance Theatre, *Interview by author*, March 2026.

Diversify the genres and styles and try all the things—you never know what you might end up enjoying. Dance is an oral tradition; the movement practice started with a person, in person, and there is high value in that. Allow yourself to follow your curiosity. Keep going, persevere.⁷

Participants emphasized that sustaining a career required not only maintaining physical capacity, but also remaining open to new experiences, environments, and forms of knowledge. Teaching was frequently identified as reinforcing this process, deepening dancers' understanding of their own work through observation, articulation, and reflection. Digital platforms and online resources were also cited as important tools for maintaining access to training, research, and professional development.

This expanded understanding of adaptability and evolving practice also surfaced in conversations around injury, change, and the shifting relationship dancers have with their bodies over time. Across interviews, dancers described injury not as a singular event, but as an ongoing process. Rather than following a linear trajectory of recovery, injury was framed as requiring continual attention and adjustment—an evolving relationship that must be navigated throughout a dancer's life. Reflecting this perspective through lived experience, dance artist and educator Alexander Olivieri, who performed professionally for over a decade, including with the New York City-based company 10 Hairy Legs, and now teaches at the University of Central Oklahoma, speaks to redefining practice in the face of injury:

Be open to the possibility of major injury, like in my case-hip replacement surgery, and that doesn't have to end your dancing or your love for dance. Find ways to redefine what restriction means [for yourself]. Our bodies get older and what we to do them throughout our lives has repercussions down the road. You don't see what's coming until it happens. I encourage dancers to be brave and not be afraid that your experiences with dance may change. It's important to establish a

7. Nol Simones, Dancer, Freelance, *Interview by author*, February 2026.

self-practice no matter how big, elaborate, small or nuanced it is; maintaining some sort of relationship with yourself, with movement is really important, for your brain and for your spirit . . .⁸

Olivieri's reflection reframes injury not as an endpoint, but as a catalyst for redefining one's relationship to movement and practice. His emphasis on cultivating an ongoing "self-practice" underscores the necessity of maintaining connection—to the body, to movement, and to identity—regardless of changing physical capacities. Rather than resisting change, this perspective invites dancers to approach limitation as a site of adaptation, where new forms of engagement and understanding can emerge. In this way, sustaining a dance career becomes less about avoiding injury and more about developing the tools to respond to it, physically and mentally, over time. This shift toward responsiveness and self-awareness directly informs how dancers approach the care and conditioning of their bodies in practice.

5.2 *Physical Conditioning & Maintenance*

In addition to mindset, physical maintenance and body awareness appeared as near-universal supports across participants' experiences. Dancers consistently emphasized the importance of developing an informed and responsive relationship with their bodies over time. Dance artist and educator Amy Griffith, who performed as a dancer at Walt Disney World and continues to work in dance education, underscores the importance of working in alignment with one's individual structure:

Learn your body. Staying within the shape of your own structure when you move is imperative for longevity and injury-prevention, especially as we get older.⁹

Participants further identified daily practices—such as warm-ups, pacing, rest, and

8. Alexander Olivieri, Assistant Professor of Dance, University of Central Oklahoma, *Interview by author*, February 2026.

9. Amy Griffith, Dancer, Freelance (inactive), *Interview by author*, February 2026.

hydration—as foundational to sustaining physical capacity, alongside a wide range of cross-training approaches. These included strength training, Pilates, yoga, ballet, CounterTechnique, and other forms of movement practice that support alignment, efficiency, and injury prevention.

Expanding on the role of structured maintenance and care, dance artist, educator, and scholar Brandye Lee, a former performer with Ailey II and the national tour of *The Lion King*, and currently Assistant Professor of Dance at the University of Oklahoma, emphasizes both physical upkeep and personal responsibility within a dance career:

Engage in a regular practice of dance technique class and cross-training, and include physical therapy, acupuncture, massage, etc., as needed. This will keep the body ready for your physical demands. And then have faith in yourself, knowing that you have something to offer the world. Know that your light is needed and worthy of being seen, and do what you can to keep it lit. That’s your responsibility. No one is going to do that for you.¹⁰

Echoing this connection between care and persistence, freelance dancer Kaitlyn Murphy, originally based in Oklahoma City and now working in New York City, highlights the relationship between physical maintenance and continued opportunity:

Take care of your body and keep going for it. The right opportunities will find you.¹¹

Focusing more specifically on conditioning and efficiency, Bay Area–based dancer and multidisciplinary movement artist Colin Epstein, who has been active for over fifteen years, points to strength training, release, and pattern awareness as essential components of long-term sustainability:

10. Brandye Lee, Assistant Professor of Dance, University of Oklahoma, *Interview by author*, March 2026.

11. Kaitlyn Murphy, Dancer, Freelance, *Interview by author*, March 2026.

Start lifting early, do your strength training to help prevent injuries. Cross-train your movement discipline. . . . Learn to use your kinetic chains and bones properly to achieve momentum. Learn where and when you can release and let go . . . this is something that you have to do as you get older anyways so you should incorporate that as early as possible. Learn where your patterns are inefficient and break those habits.¹²

This emphasis on cross-training and continued physical learning was echoed across dancers working in different styles and contexts. Choreographer and interdisciplinary dance artist Lindy Fines, artistic director of the New York City–based multimedia project GREYZONE, highlights cross-training and curiosity as essential to sustaining both physical practice and artistic connection:

Cross-train!! And really, really learn about the body, your body, and have that be a curiosity so that you can sustain yourself. . . . You have to love it and be passionate about it . . . Merce Cunningham said it best: ‘You have to love dancing to stick to it. It gives you nothing back—no manuscripts to store away, no painting to show on walls and maybe hang in museums, no poems to be printed and sold—nothing but that fleeting moment when you feel alive.’¹³

Similarly emphasizing consistency and the role of class as ongoing maintenance, dance artist and educator Roxanne Lyst, who performed with companies including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Ailey II, and PHILADANCO, and is currently Associate Professor of Modern Dance at the University of Oklahoma and Artistic Director of Contemporary Dance Oklahoma, reflects on cross-training and sustained practice as critical to longevity:

For me, it was the cross-training that really helped me. Cross-training and never stop taking class. . . . Because choreography is all one sided, and class is the great

12. Colin Epstein, Dancer / Performer, Freelance, *Interview by author*, February 2026.

13. Lindy Fines, Choreographer, Artistic Director, GREYZONE, *Interview by author*, February 2026.

evening. Class is your maintenance and your time to get out the kinks. It's also your time to find something new in your body. Take care of your body. Do what is best for you with the styles that you work with—that's going to look different for everybody.¹⁴

Beyond physical practices, dancers also developed heightened sensitivity to bodily signals such as tension, fatigue, and overexertion, often adjusting their approaches in response. For some, this awareness extended beyond the studio, influencing how they moved, rested, and conserved energy in daily life.

5.2.1 Cross-training as a Factor: A Closer Look

As interviews progressed, the subject of cross-training was consistently referenced. One response from dancer Katherine Elena Hanson, who has worked as a freelance artist and is currently performing with New Orleans Ballet Theatre while engaging in dance scholarship and arts research, emphasized the role of cross-training not only in physical maintenance, but in navigating long-term career development:

Cross-training is huge. Having all the institutional support: Cross-training, PT, Nutritionist, Counselor, Body Care Practitioners, all of that helps be able to deal with those changes of aging bodies. And having those people too help you navigate your own body and where it is at, that's super important. . . . Keeping a point of reference of 'What do I actually want out of this career?' And 'What is my projection looking like', and not just 'What am I feeling on this particular day.' On top of that, having clear goals for yourself, and keep revisiting those.¹⁵

Early on in the interview process, this term appeared casually in participants' responses,

14. Roxanne Lyst, Artistic Director, Contemporary Dance Oklahoma, Associate Professor of Dance, University of Oklahoma, *Interview by author*, February 2026.

15. Katherine Hanson, Dancer, New Orleans Ballet Theatre, *Interview by author*, February 2026.

often without elaboration. Initially, I assumed a shared understanding of what cross training entailed. By the seventh or eighth interview, however, I found myself pausing: What did cross-training actually mean to participants? Were they referring to the same practices, or using the same term to describe fundamentally different approaches?

This emerging question revealed an important ambiguity. Although cross-training is widely referenced in both dance practice and dance science, it is not a singular or universally defined activity. In dance medicine and conditioning literature, cross training is generally understood as the use of supplemental physical practices outside of traditional technique class in order to enhance overall physical capacity, support performance demands, and reduce injury risk.¹⁶ In dance contexts, this often includes conditioning practices that address strength, endurance, flexibility, and recovery beyond what is typically developed in class.

However, participants' responses complicated this seemingly straightforward definition. While the term "cross-training" circulated easily within conversations, its meaning varied significantly depending on the individual and their lived experience. For some dancers, cross-training referred primarily to strength-based practices such as weightlifting, resistance training, or Pilates. For others, it included cardiovascular conditioning, yoga, martial arts, somatic practices, or restorative modalities oriented toward recovery and longevity rather than performance output. In this way, cross-training functioned as an umbrella term—widely invoked, yet broad enough to obscure meaningful differences in intention, intensity, and application.

Recognizing this gap in shared terminology, I began asking more specific follow up questions whenever cross-training was mentioned: What does cross-training look like for you? How often do you engage in it? What do you hope it supports in your body or career? These questions clarified participants' meanings and revealed a wide spectrum of approaches shaped by

16. R. Kish, J. Morton, and D.A. Gabriel, *Dancing Longer, Dancing Stronger: A Dancer's Guide to Conditioning, Improving Technique, and Preventing Injury*, 2nd ed. (Princeton Book Company, Publishers, 2019), 1–4, ISBN: 9780871273970.

factors such as age, injury history, training background, and access to resources. They also illuminated my own assumptions, underscoring that understanding sustainability required listening beyond familiar terminology and attending closely to how dancers themselves defined and adapted these practices.

Despite the variability in definition, participants' responses strongly aligned with existing scholarship in dance conditioning and injury prevention. Conditioning and cross-training have long been advocated as essential components of a dancer's training, particularly in relation to injury prevention and performance optimization. As dance medicine researchers Robin Kish and Jennie Morton note in their *Guide to Strength, Technique, and Injury Prevention for Dancers, 2nd ed.*, the value of conditioning programs for strength and flexibility has been well documented in athletics, and similar approaches are recommended for dancers by physical therapists and dance medicine professionals.¹⁷ These practitioners emphasize that many injuries can be prevented when conditioning is integrated with careful technique work.

Cross-training and conditioning become not only health-supportive practices but also professional necessities within a highly competitive field. Dance medicine and condition specialists Kish and Morton argue that dancers with optimal physical fitness and fewer injuries hold a clear advantage in securing and sustaining employment.¹⁸ A consistent conditioning practice allows dancers to remain physically prepared for auditions, fulfill contractual obligations, and reduce time lost to injury—factors that directly impact employability and longevity. In this sense, cross-training becomes intertwined with economic survival as much as physical well-being.

From a physiological perspective, the importance of cross-training is further reinforced by the repetitive nature of dance practice. Dance training often emphasizes specific movement patterns, which can lead to muscular imbalances and overuse injuries over time. Conditioning programs, in contrast, offer dancers an opportunity to work outside the constraints of

17. Kish, Morton, and Gabriel, *Dancing Longer*, 6–9, 16–20.

18. Kish, Morton, and Gabriel, *Dancing Longer*, 4.

choreography and technique class, allowing them to strengthen underutilized muscle groups, increase joint range of motion, and reduce chronic tension.¹⁹ This expanded approach to training supports not only enhanced performance but also a more sustainable relationship to the body.

Taken together, both the literature and participant experiences suggest that cross training operates as a critical—yet highly individualized—component of sustainable dance practice. While the term itself may lack precise definition within the field, its consistent presence across interviews underscores its perceived importance. At the same time, the wide variation in how dancers interpret and implement cross-training highlights the need for more nuanced, dancer-centered understandings of conditioning practices. Rather than assuming a shared definition, this study suggests that cross-training is best understood as a flexible, adaptive practice—one that dancers shape in response to their own bodies, histories, and long-term aspirations.

5.3 *Support Structures*

As survey responses questions clarified participants' meanings and revealed a wide range of approaches shaped by age, injury history, training background, and access to resources, they also illuminated my own assumptions, underscoring that understanding sustainability required listening beyond familiar terminology and attending closely to how dancers defined and adapted practices for their own long term needs. Building on these reflections, broader patterns began to emerge around the systems and structures that support—or limit—the ability to sustain a dance career over time.

Financial support surfaced as one of the most consistent and decisive factors influencing longevity. Many participants acknowledged that family support, partners, secondary employment, or financial stability enabled them to continue training, performing, or transitioning roles within

19. Kish, Morton, and Gabriel, *Dancing Longer*, 6.

the field. In situations where dancers were not working solely to meet immediate financial demands, they described having greater capacity to invest in artistic development, recovery, and long-term sustainability. Conversely, the absence of these resources was frequently cited as a reason dancers stepped away from performance despite a continued desire to remain engaged.

Teaching, tutoring, administrative work, and grant writing were often described as strategies for maintaining income while staying connected to dance. At the same time, teaching was repeatedly identified as physically demanding when not balanced with time for personal training and recovery, highlighting an ongoing negotiation between financial survival and physical sustainability.

These individual experiences were frequently situated within a broader awareness of economic precarity in the U.S. dance field, where limited government funding and minimal social safety nets leave artists heavily reliant on personal networks. In contrast, dancers with experience in European contexts emphasized how access to healthcare, stipends, parental leave, and housing security supported longer and more sustainable careers.

Alongside financial considerations, emotional and relational support emerged as equally vital. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of connection, community, and shared experience in sustaining both their work and their sense of belonging within the field. Many also described sustainability as extending beyond professional opportunities alone, emphasizing the need to cultivate physical well-being, creative fulfillment, and meaningful engagement with life outside the studio.

Dance artist and educator Maria Krey Gibson, an Oklahoma City public school educator who performed with Perpetual Motion Dance and in cabaret-based work, and whose practice centers on collaboration and interdisciplinary movement, emphasizes connection as a multi-layered and expansive practice:

Stay connected in all definitions of that. Prioritize your recovery. Prioritize your

health, and not just the aesthetic of health, but deep, energetic tissues of health. Stay connected in the community. Show up. Not only for your stage time, but for others' stage time too. Be there for one another . . . you have to seek out other forms of embodiment, outside of your little window or bubble . . . so, staying connected in all definitions.²⁰

Similarly emphasizing the active construction of support systems, dance artist and educator Brandi Kelley, an Oklahoma City public school educator and department chair who has performed with RACE Dance Collective since 2009, and whose work spans K–12 education and community-based dance practice, frames community as something dancers must intentionally build and sustain:

You can't wait for people to show up for you for that. We have to ask 'How can you start to create that community for yourself'. Find your people first, because it takes a community of people and that root system. Show up and take the class however you want or need to, and you don't have to ask for permission for that. Because we do get to take up space. When you can, be that representation. Show up, speak out to people where and when you need to. Think about all that we are gaining out of this experience, not what we are losing.²¹

These reflections extend the idea of support beyond individual resources, pointing toward systems that are not only institutional but deeply relational—formed through peer networks, mentorship, and shared artistic environments. Across interviews, dancers described how community provides continuity, encouragement, and a sense of possibility. Seeing others continue dancing across the lifespan was often experienced as both affirming and expansive.

Mentorship also surfaced as a meaningful form of support. Long-term relationships that extended beyond technical instruction into guidance, affirmation, and continuity were described

20. Maria Krey Gibson, Dance Teacher, Putnam City Schools, *Interview by author*, February 2026.

21. Brandi Kelley, Project Director, RACE Dance Collective, Faculty, Classen School of Advanced Studies, *Interview by author*, February 2026.

as stabilizing forces. In contrast, dancers without access to mentorship often described building their careers through self-education, trial and error, and informal support systems.

Institutional support, while less consistently available, was described as impactful when present. Participants identified specific programs, clinics, and organizations that contributed to their longevity, particularly those offering access to dance-informed healthcare, subsidized training, or paid opportunities. However, these resources were often limited by cost, geographic location, or awareness, and were frequently accessed after injury rather than as a preventative measure.

When reflecting on what they wished had been available earlier, participants most frequently identified gaps in education, access, and preventative care. Many noted that earlier exposure to anatomy, kinesiology, and embodied understandings of movement could have mitigated injury and extended performance careers. Mental health support also emerged as a significant and persistent gap, with several participants describing environments in which emotional struggles were minimized or stigmatized. These reflections emphasized the importance of recognizing mental health as integral to sustainability rather than as a response to crisis.

Access to ongoing training surfaced as another important concern. Dancers expressed a desire for more age-inclusive classes, affordable studio access, paid warm-up time within rehearsals, and clearer transitional support between training and professional work. Participants also pointed to underutilized resources-such as empty studios and performance spaces-as missed opportunities that could be reimaged to better support artists.

Across interviews, sustainability was consistently framed not as maintaining a fixed state, but as adapting over time. Dancers described longevity as a continual negotiation between physical capacity, artistic interest, life circumstances, and evolving priorities. Within this perspective, supportive environments were those that allowed for experimentation, honored lived experience, and recognized dancers as whole individuals rather than as bodies optimized for

short-term output.

At the same time, participants were clear in identifying structural barriers that limit sustainability. Ageism emerged as a persistent issue, often embedded in expectations about how bodies should move, what they should look like, and how long they should remain visible. As one participant observed, limitations are often created not by the body itself, but by the expectations placed upon it. Highlighting how these expectations can obscure the strengths and capacities of more experienced dancers, dance artist and educator Roxanne Lyst, reflects on the disconnect between expectation and lived experience:

For me, one of the biggest challenges is when expectations are based on doing the same thing as younger dancers, rather than recognizing what older dancers are actually capable of and where they excel.²²

Participants also identified ableism as an underlying factor, noting that many professional environments are structured around narrow definitions of ability and endurance. Aging was frequently framed as an individual problem rather than a structural condition, obscuring the lack of systems designed to support bodies that change over time. Economic precarity further compounded these challenges. Low wages, lack of healthcare access, and unpaid labor were repeatedly cited as conditions that made it difficult to sustain a career over time. Several dancers noted that the field's prioritization of short-term output often favors younger dancers perceived as more "efficient" or less costly.

Framing retention as a key structural issue within the field, professional dancer Derek Harris emphasizes the importance of long-term recognition and value:

If more dancers felt valued and wanted as they age, they might stick around—especially if they are valued for being in a place for a length of time.²³

22. Lyst, *Interview by author*.

23. Harris, *Interview by author*.

These observations position retention itself as a form of support—suggesting that when dancers are recognized for long-term contribution, experience, and depth of practice, sustainability becomes more achievable.

Despite these barriers, participants also identified meaningful shifts within the field, including increased inter-generational casting, expanded aesthetic values, and more collaborative approaches to performance-making. Education was also identified as a critical site of change, with participants calling for greater emphasis on anatomy, sustainability, and career navigation. Offering a perspective that reframes longevity through individual agency and mindset, movement artist Hui Cha Poos reflects on how dancers define the scope of their own careers:

The only real barrier is what we create ourselves . . . Your career can be as short or as long as you allow it to be—you define what you want it to look like.²⁴

These perspectives suggest that sustaining a dance career requires not only individual accountability, but also broader shifts in the values placed upon experience, change, and embodied knowledge over time within the support structures available and the field of dance in general.

24. Poos, *Interview by author*.

CHAPTER VI

Visioning Forward

6.1 Research Conclusions

As this research unfolded, the guiding question shifted from how long a dance career can last to how dancers remain in relationship with their work over time, through change, adaptation, and evolving conditions. Across interviews, embodied practice, pedagogical reflection, and performance-as-research, a consistent theme emerged: longevity in dance is not a matter of resisting change, but of learning how to move with it.

Across these modes of inquiry, a shared ethic of listening became visible—listening to bodies, to one another, and to the structures and conditions that shape how dance is practiced, valued, and sustained. The dancers who shared their stories did not frame sustainability as a singular achievement or fixed endpoint. Instead, they described it as an ongoing practice shaped by curiosity, adaptation, care, and permission. Physical change, injury, and shifting priorities were not positioned as failures, but as moments that required attentiveness, recalibration, and creative problem-solving. Within this framing, longevity appears less as a measure of how long one remains visible onstage and more as the capacity to remain in a meaningful relationship with dance across evolving circumstances.

At the same time, this research underscores that individual adaptability alone is not enough. While dancers develop remarkable skills of self-awareness and resilience, their ability to

continue working is deeply shaped by access—to care, to education, to community, and to financial and institutional support. Many of the barriers dancers encounter are not inherent to aging bodies, but are produced and reinforced by systems that privilege short-term output over long-term contribution. Ageism, ableism, economic precarity, and limited infrastructures of care continue to narrow who is permitted to remain in the field and under what conditions.

Through personal praxis and performance-as-research, this thesis has posited the dancing body itself as a site of knowledge. Techniques, somatic practices, recovery strategies, and improvisational approaches emerge not as supplements to rigorous training, but as essential tools for sustaining both physical and artistic life. Performance—particularly improvisational performance—offered a way to explore visibility, endurance, and witnessing in real time, asking how dancers are seen, by whom, and under what conditions. These inquiries reinforce the idea that being seen is not simply about audience attention, but about value, recognition, and belonging.

The autoethnographic dimension of this project further affirmed the value of embodied experience as a source of research insight. By engaging simultaneously as researcher, performer, educator, and participant, I was able to examine questions of aging, sustainability, and visibility not only through the perspectives of others, but also through my own lived and moving body. This process required a different kind of listening—one that treated lived experience as a source of knowledge and reinforced the project's commitment to understanding dance knowledge as something generated through experience, relationship, and practice as much as through observation and analysis.

Collectively, these findings point toward a reimagining of dance not as a profession with a prescribed lifespan, but as a field capable of holding artists across many seasons of life. Grounded in the expressed needs, desires, and lived realities of the dancers whose voices shape this study, this vision does not function as a fixed blueprint, but as an invitation to imagine what becomes

possible when lived experience is treated as foundational knowledge rather than an afterthought.

Ultimately, this work has not identified or established a single pathway for longevity in dance. Instead, it discusses conditions that make many pathways possible. Sustaining dance careers requires more than personal determination—it requires permission, representation, and systems designed to support change rather than deny it. If the field is willing to listen—to dancers’ bodies, experiences, and collective wisdom—then longevity in dance can be understood not as an exception, but as an evolving and generative possibility.

6.2 *Future Directions*

My desire to sustain a long and meaningful dance career has been a through-line in my life, making this research an intuitive extension of my artistic and pedagogical commitments. From the outset, I understood this project not as a definitive account of sustainability in dance, but as an entry point into a much larger conversation—one that extends beyond the scope of an MFA timeline.

As the research unfolded, it became clear that meaningful inquiry into longevity in dance requires time, breadth, and multiplicity of perspective. With additional time, this work could expand to include a wider range of voices across generations—not only mid- and late-career dancers, but early-career artists, pre-professionals, and those navigating transitions between performance, teaching, choreography, and other roles within the field.

A longer research arc would also allow for deeper engagement with dancers working outside the United States, examining how cultural contexts, funding structures, pedagogical systems, labor conditions, and aesthetic values shape perceptions of sustainability across global contexts.

Further expansion would support a more nuanced examination across dance forms and

related performance practices. Sustainability in ballet, contemporary dance, hip hop, Afro-diasporic forms, somatic-based practices, and physical theatre is shaped by distinct training demands, histories, and cultural frameworks. Extending this research would allow for a cross-disciplinary understanding that acknowledges difference without flattening complexity.

Rather than viewing the limits of this initial study as constraints, they have clarified how necessary and expansive this inquiry truly is. These realizations have prompted me to consider doctoral study as a pathway for continuing this work. A PhD trajectory would provide the methodological depth and sustained engagement needed to broaden the interview pool, deepen international dialogue, and situate this research within larger conversations around embodiment, labor, aging, and performance.

In addition to academic pathways, I am interested in translating this research into more accessible formats. One possibility is the development of a podcast or digital platform that features excerpts from interviews and conversations with dancers, choreographers, teachers, and thought leaders. Such a format could bridge academic and professional communities, bringing discussions of longevity, representation, and sustainability into the spaces where dancers live and work.

Looking ahead, I am interested in expanding *Can You See Me Now ... How 'Bout Now?* beyond its initial single-evening premiere into a work that can exist over time, across spaces, and with a continually evolving cast.

I imagine restaging the performance in multiple venues—ranging from formal presentation sites such as Oklahoma Contemporary or OKCMOA to more intimate, process-forward spaces like RACE Dance Collective—allowing the work to shift in relationship to its environment and audience. Central to this future iteration is the possibility of recasting and rotating performers across a spectrum of career stages, from emerging to late-career artists, so that each performance holds a different constellation of lived experience and physical knowledge.

This approach would not only keep the work in motion, but also foreground the presence and value of the aging dancer by making their work more visible within the local ecosystem. I am particularly drawn to the potential of inviting under-recognized artists in the Norman and Oklahoma City communities into this process, offering a platform for continued artistic contribution.

In a region where there is limited focus on the older dancing body, I see this project as one way of building visibility and audience engagement—working toward a cultural shift in which sustained dancing lives are not the exception, but an expected and valued part of the field.

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APPENDIX A

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

Subject: Invitation to Participate in MFA Dance Research on Career Sustainability

Dear (insert name),

My name is Meegan Hertensteiner, and I am currently completing my MFA in Dance at the University of Oklahoma. My thesis research focuses on **sustainability and longevity in dance careers**, particularly for mid- to late-career dancers.

I am seeking participants to share their experiences through a **short questionnaire and/or an interview**. Your insights will help deepen understanding of how dancers navigate career transitions, maintain physical and creative vitality, and adapt to evolving professional landscapes.

I hope to gather a wide range of perspectives—from dancers who are earlier in their careers and still actively performing, to those who have stepped away from the stage and are pursuing different pathways. Every story adds valuable depth to this research.

Participation Details:

- **Format:** Questionnaire (email) and/or a 60-90 minute interview (virtual or in person)
- **Timeline:** All interviews/Questionnaire completed by March 1st, 2026
- **Consent Form:** A consent form and more details will be provided

If you are interested, please reply to this email or contact me directly at **meegan.e.hertensteiner-1@ou.edu**.

Additionally, if you know others who might be interested in sharing their experiences, I would greatly appreciate it if you could pass this invitation along. Your help in spreading the word means a lot and will make this research even more meaningful.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to contribute to research that aims to support dancers' long-term well-being and creative growth.

Warm regards,
Meegan Hertensteiner
MFA Candidate, University of Oklahoma
meegan.e.hertensteiner-1@ou.edu

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Guide: Sustaining and Prolonging Dance Careers

This interview guide is designed for Meegan Hertensteiner's MFA research on sustaining and prolonging dance careers. It aims to explore the experiences, challenges, and insights of dancers in mid to late stages of their careers, whether they are still performing or have transitioned away from performance.

Demographic & Contextual Information

1. How long have you been dancing professionally?
2. What genres or styles have you primarily worked in?
3. Do you identify with any communities (e.g. BIPOC, LGBTQ+, disabled) that have shaped your experience in dance?

Career Longevity & Sustainability

4. What factors have contributed most to your ability to continue dancing or your decision to step away?
5. Have you made any significant changes to your training, performance style, or recovery practices over the years?
6. How do you manage physical limitations or injuries while maintaining your artistic practice or transitioning from it?

Support Systems & Resources

7. What kinds of support (financial, emotional, institutional) have been most helpful in sustaining your career?
8. Are there specific programs, organizations, or communities that have supported your longevity or transition?
9. Were there resources or support you wish had been available to help you continue dancing longer?

Artistic Evolution & Identity

10. How has your artistic voice or movement vocabulary evolved over time?
11. Do you feel your age or experience has influenced the types of roles or projects you pursue or pursued?
12. How has your relationship with dance changed over time, especially if you've stepped away from performing?

Accessibility, Inclusion, & Industry Change

13. What barriers do you see for older dancers in the professional dance world?
14. What changes would you like to see in the dance industry to make it more inclusive for mid-to-late career artists?
15. What do you think the dance world needs to do to better support aging dancers?

Reflections & Advice

16. Looking back, what do you feel were the biggest challenges to sustaining a dance career long-term?
17. What advice would you give to dancers who want to continue performing into their 40s, 50s, and beyond?
18. Have you found other ways to stay connected to the dance community or creative expression?

Addendum: Added midway into the interview process:

19. When you were younger, at what age did you think a dance career typically ended? Has that belief changed over time, and if so, what influenced that shift?
20. What age do you now feel a dance career can extend to, and why?

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW RESPONSES, QUESTION 17

Unabridged responses to the below interview question are presented here.

17. What advice would you give to dancers who want to continue performing into their 40s, 50s, and beyond?

Anonymous:

“Go to so many different classes, even within dance, and don’t cut yourself off just cause you know you love this one thing. Go to classes and sit in the hallway and talk to people. If you’re in a place where you can try different things, try them all! Or just dance around your room. . . .There’s always room for movement.”

Colin Epstein:

“Start lifting early, do your strength training to help prevent injuries. Cross-train your movement discipline. Find some sort of release training, whatever that means for you. Learn to use your Kinetic trains and bones properly to achieve momentum. Learn where and when you can release and let go...this is something that you have to do as you get older anyways so you should incorporate that as early as possible. Learn where your patterns are inefficient and break those habits.”

Lindy Fines:

“Cross-train!! And really, really learn about the body, your body, and have that be a curiosity so that you can sustain yourself. Build your community around what you love and what you do. You have to love it and be passionate about it....Merce Cunningham said it best, ‘You have to love dancing to stick to it. It gives you nothing back — no manuscripts to store away, no painting to show on walls and maybe hang in museums, no poems to be printed and sold — nothing but that fleeting moment when you feel alive.’”

Maria Krey Gibson:

“Stay connected in all definitions of that. Prioritize your recovery. Prioritize your health, and not just the aesthetic of health, but deep, energetic tissues of health. Stay connected in the community. Show up. Not only for your stage time, but for others’ stage time too. Be there for one another. Stay connected to the thing that draws us. Go outside and touch the grass. Go and see a body of water and sense your divinity. Go take a pottery class. Do other forms of creative expression. . . you have to seek out other forms of embodiment, outside of your little window or bubble. . . so, staying connected in all definitions.”

Amy Griffith:

“Learn your body. Staying within the shape of your own structure when you move is imperative for longevity and injury-prevention, especially as we get older.”

Emily Hansel:

“Find the models for it. . . .that was something that I was lucky to stumble into because of the programming that’s around me. Everyone is doing that in different ways. All of the models that I have, who are dancers who are 50 years or older, have their own unique trajectory. So that’s so reassuring that I will be unique in mine, if that’s what I want when the time comes.”

Katherine Hanson:

“Cross-training is huge. Having all the institutional support: Cross-training, PT, Nutritionist, Counselor, Body Care Practitioners, all of that helps be able to deal with those changes of aging bodies. And having those people too help you navigate your own body and where it is at, that’s super important. Figuring out some sort of way to calculate for yourself ‘what things are important’. . . .it could be a pros/cons list, or a way to list or place everyday feedback for yourself, over a length of time, to be able to figure out what is happening. In dance and other performing arts, we are so emotionally involved with our work. And with that, it’s hard sometimes to take yourself out of the moment to look at the bigger picture. Keeping a point of reference of ‘What do I actually want out of this career?’ And ‘What is my projection looking like’, and not just ‘What am I feeling on this particular day.’ On top of that, having clear goals for yourself, and keep revisiting those.”

Derek Harris:

“Keep going.. Keep showing up. Step away as many times as you want, but keep coming back. We need dance more than it needs us. Dance, as an art form, is ephemeral and unforgiving. Accept that you’re doing it because you love it, and accept that it’s something you can’t take with you. Figure out what makes you unique and interesting, and what your experiences offer that no

one else has, and bring that into what you do. Don't think that you know everything. Continue to learn and grow."

Austin Hartel:

"As long as you want to perform, control the process, or stay physically in the shape that you need to be in to perform someone else's work and to be a part of their process. If you are the creator, you know the what, where, when and how, and then you fit yourself into it/ That's actually the biggest thing. . . .controlling the process. While this isn't always possible, but if you can control the process, that's gonna give you the ability to keep doing what you want to do and how you want to do it, because you're in control of that process."

Brandi Kelley:

"You can't wait for people to show up for you for that. We have to ask 'How can you start to create that community for yourself'. Find your people first, because it takes a community of people and that root system. Show up and take the class however you want or need to, and you don't have to ask for permission for that. Because we do get to take up space. When you can, be that representation. Show up, speak out to people where and when you need to. Think about all that we are gaining out of this experience, not what we are losing."

Brandye Lee

"Engage in a regular practice of dance technique class and cross-training, and include physical therapy, acupuncture, massage, etc., as needed. This will keep the body ready for your physical demands. And then have faith in yourself, knowing that you have something to offer the world. Know that your light is needed and worthy of being seen and do what you can to keep it

lit. That's your responsibility. No one is going to do that for you."

Gildas Lemonnier:

"You can do it. . . anything is possible! My main advice would be to remain in conversation with your body to understand what it needs. Whatever that means for you. Find a routine that fulfills your body's needs to keep it healthy and able to achieve what you are asking of it. Be open the fact that what dancing and performing means to you can change. It might be different now than 20 years ago. It might be less physically demanding but it doesn't mean that it's lesser. I think sustaining a dance career as we get older requires honesty with ourselves, about what we can and cannot do, about what we want and maybe what we don't want to do anymore. Being clear about what dance means to you in the present moment, which might be different from what it meant a few years ago. This makes and creates space for different types of dancing and expressions, as well as representation for all ages and bodies. Dance is not about being young it is about being human, it's not not about being entertaining only, it's about expressing yourself. Aging doesn't have to mean lesser; it might mean doing things differently, but it is not lesser."

Roxanne Lyst:

"For me, it was the cross training that really helped me. Cross-training and never stop taking class. I remember having one choreographer I worked with say to never stop taking class. Because choreography is all one sided, and class is the great evener. Class is you maintenance and your time to get out the kinks. It's also your time to find something new in your body. Take care of your body. DO what is best for you with the styles that you work with, that's going to look and be different for everybody. Make sure that you are getting enough sleep. Sleep is recovery. As dancers we are so used to the go, go, go, and the do what we need to do, and then we are just not getting enough rest or sleep."

Brinney Mahmood

“Just go for it and do it! Believe in yourself — the power of belief is huge and you have got to believe in yourself. Live your life with no regrets!”

Kaitlyn Murphy:

“Take care of your body and keep going for it. The right opportunities will find you.”

Alexander Olivieri:

“Be open to the possibility of major injury, like in my case - hip replacement surgery, and that doesn’t have to end your dancing or your love for dance. Find ways to redefine what restriction means [for yourself]. Our bodies get older and what we do them throughout our lives has repercussions down the road. You don’t see what’s coming until it happens. I encourage dancers to be brave and not be afraid that your experiences with dance may change. It’s important to establish a self-practice no matter how big, elaborate, small or nuanced it is; maintaining some sort of relationship with yourself, with movement is really important, for your brain and for your spirit. . . ”

Hui Cha Poos:

“Give as much as you are taking. Because, like with anything, the gift, say I’m giving to you, and you are receiving it, it is actually something that I’m receiving as well. . . .so it’s a two-way street. That could mean monetarily, or that could mean using dance as a service. I champion ‘for pay’ for dance all the time, but I also think it’s just as important to gift. Because that is a long-lasting benefit. Giving truly is healing.”

LizAnne Roman Roberts:

“Be comfortable with who you are, and listen to what you are saying to yourself. The frequency or the types of progress you encounter might change. Do not be intimidated by what your 14-year-old self thinks about what your career looks like now. What ‘YOU’ right now, where you are standing, wants to make of what dance is in your life is 100feels everything else that your life is. And your life as it is now feels the dance.”

Nol Simones:

“Diversify the genres and styles and try all the things, you never know what you might end up enjoying. It (Dance) is an oral tradition; the movement practice started with a teacher and with a person, in person and there is high value in that. Allow yourself to follow your bliss, even when it might not feel great. Keep going, persevere. Art is a luxury, and you get to do it. People don’t allow themselves to dance every day, and we as dancers get to. Let yourself be selfish and DO IT!”

Deborah Slater:

“The first thing I tell anyone who fantasizes about being a choreographer or dancer is that ‘you have to have to do it’. . . it’s not like, ‘oh that looks like fun’. It has to be the way that you communicate in the world. It has to be something that you must do. Because it is way too difficult to do. It’s not a hobby, you can do it as a hobbyist, but not if you want to be a real choreographer or performer. . . .so there’s that. . . . There’s also a level of exposure and vulnerability that you must be prepared to face if you’re going to be an artist. You have to tell the truth, I think. For me, I try and be as truthful as possible, and that can be very hard. But in some ways I feel like I learn more about myself by being on stage than by just sitting and thinking about things. That’s when I

find out what I've really been thinking and what I'm emotionally experiencing. It's an enormous gift to be able to do this as a career, and also extremely challenging in this world. . . .so you will get more than you could imagine and it will be very hard in the process. . . .but I never regretted making this choice."

Charles Slender-White:

"Know why you dance, and what dance brings into your life. Know, also that might change over time and that's okay. Dancing isn't just about your body and what your body can or can't do. Dancing exists in the context of your entire life and requires that context to help make the dancing possible. A lot of older dancers share stories about how their bodies feel and nostalgia about dance moves they could do in the past but can no longer manage. Some of their stories might apply to you, and some might not. Listen with compassion and empathy. Don't blame the audience for their interests or lack of interests. Just because a dancer wants to perform doesn't necessarily mean an audience wants to watch. About performing in particular. . . .do it if it brings you pleasure and adds value to your life. Stop doing it if it doesn't."

Hannah Westbrook:

"Eat enough food. . . .and REST enough!!!"

Nina Wollny:

"Have love for yourself and have love for others. Have love and respect for the world. There is something in that that is super powerful, and in the end, all the things I'm speaking about is that. There is something big when there is support for each other. . . .you're not just making dance, but you are also together bringing the dance field forward. Don't put out your elbows. . .

.put out your arms like you are holding hands, or supporting, or hugging. And if you truly, really go into all that, than you can just GO.”

Sarah Worden:

“Port de bras becomes more important, the push through the feet, completion of the line, listening to the music. Forty-five degrees is still a beautiful line. . . .it’s about finding other ways to fill the music. Listening to your body becomes more important. I think we are better at it after a few decades into adulthood, but pushing through minor aches may end up leading to a longer recovery. Find a teacher who respects you, your body, your experience, and the art form. I can give myself a good class, but letting myself be the student improves my teaching (in ballet class and middle school social studies). I can’t fix mistakes I made in the past or change decisions. That’s not why I still dance. I’m not on stage, although I do want to be again, but each class is an opportunity for me to not just move for me, but to share a piece of artistry with others.”

APPENDIX D CONSENT FORM

Signed Consent to Participate in Research University of Oklahoma

Would you like to be involved in research at the University of Oklahoma?

I am Meegan Hertensteiner from the School of Dance Department, and I invite you to participate in my research entitled “Prolonging the Dance Career”. This research is being conducted through interviews via Zoom, phone calls, email, or in person (Oklahoma City/Norman area). You were selected as a possible participant because of your affiliation with Dance. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this research.

Please read this document and contact me to ask any questions you may have BEFORE agreeing to participate in my research.

What is the purpose of this research? The purpose of this study is to explore how dancers can sustain and prolong their careers, particularly in mid-to-late stages, through sustainable and accessible practices. By interviewing dancers who are currently active and those who have transitioned out of performing, this research aims to identify common challenges and strategies that support career longevity in dance.

How many participants will be in this research? I am aiming to interview between 50-100 people to take part in this research.

What will I be asked to do? If you agree to be in this research, you will be asked for your response to 18 questions. Questions cover Demographic & Contextual information; Career Longevity & Sustainability; Support Systems & Resources; Artistic Evolution & Identity; Accessibility, Inclusion & Industry Change; and Reflections & Advice.

How long will this take? Your participation will take roughly 60-90 minutes.

What are the risks and benefits if I participate? This study poses no more than minimal risks from being in this research.

Questions that could be emotionally distressing: We will ask you to answer questions that may make you distressed or trigger strong emotional reactions. If these questions make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to provide an answer, or you can stop our discussion or discontinue participation in the research. If the researcher sees signs that you are distressed, they will pause the discussion and ask if you would like to continue. There are also resources for you that are available anytime:

<https://www.betterhelp.com/gethelpnow/>

Audio or video recorded data collection: There is a risk of accidental data release if we collect your data using audio and video recordings. If this occurred, your identity and statements you made would become known to people who are not on the research team. To minimize this risk, the researchers will transfer data to, and store your data on, a secure platform approved by the University's Information Technology Office.

Collection of demographic or geographic location data that could lead to deductive re-identification: You will be asked to provide demographic information that describes you. We may also gather information about your geographic location in this research. Different combinations of personal and geographic information may make it possible for your identity to be guessed by someone who was given, or gained access, to our research records. To minimize the risk of deductive re-identification, we will not combine identifying variables nor analyze and report results for small groups of people with specific demographic characteristics.

Data collected online or by a device and transmitted electronically: You will be asked to complete questions as part of this research. The organization hosting the data collection platform has its own privacy and security policies for keeping your information confidential. There is a risk that the external organization, which is not part of the research team, may gain access to or retain your data or your IP address which could be used to re-identify you. No assurance can be made about their use of the data you provide for purposes other than this research.

What are the benefits if I participate? There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. However, your input may help inform strategies that support dancers in sustaining their careers.

Will I be compensated for participating? While we wish that we could, we are unable to reimburse you for your time and participation in this research.

Who will see my information? There will be no information in research reports that will make it possible to identify you without your permission. Research records will be stored securely, and only approved researchers and the OU Institutional Review Board will have access to the records. You have the right to access the research data that has been collected about you as a part of this research. However, you may not access this information until the entire research has finished and you consent to this temporary restriction.

Do I have to participate? No. If you do not participate, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the research. If you decide to participate, you don't have to answer any questions and can stop participating at any time.

Will my identity be anonymous or confidential? Your name will not be retained or linked with your responses unless you agree to be identified. Please check all of the options that you agree to:

- | | |
|--|--|
| I agree for data records to include my identifiable information. | ☐ Yes ☐ No |
| I agree to be quoted directly, without the use of my name. | ☐ Yes ☐ No |
| I agree to have my name reported with quoted material. | ☐ Yes ☐ No |
| I agree for my research data to be archived for scholarly and public access. | ☐ Yes ☐ No |

What will happen to my data in the future?

We might share your identifiable data with other researchers or use it in future research without obtaining additional consent from you.

Audio Recording of Research Activities: To assist with accurate recording of your responses, interviews may be recorded on an audio recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty.

I consent to audio recording. ___ Yes ___ No

Video Recording of Research Activities: To assist with accurate recording of your responses, interviews may be recorded on a video recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to video recording. ___ Yes ___ No

Your photographs or video images may be used in University research reports unless you tell me not to do this.

Will I be contacted again? The researcher might contact you to gather additional data or might have follow-up interview questions.

I give my permission for the researcher to contact me in the future. ___ Yes ___ No

Who do I contact with questions, concerns, or complaints? If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, please contact:

Researcher: Meegan Hertensteiner

Email: meegan.e.hertensteiner-1@ou.edu

Phone: +1-918-630-5883

Advisor: Austin Hartel

Email: ahartel@ou.edu

Phone: +1-405-325-0567 ext. 3

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) or if you cannot reach the researcher(s).

You will be given a copy of this document for your records. By providing information to the researcher(s), I agree to participate in this research.

Participant Signature	Print Name	Date
Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent	Print Name	Date