

**Behind the Curtain:
An Exploration of Perfectionism in Graduates from UK
Vocational Ballet Schools**

Student Number: 20218640
LIBA3003: Liberal Arts Dissertation

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I wanted to take a moment to extend an immense thank you to my supervisor, Dr Kim Lockwood, for your guidance and direction across the lifetime of this dissertation. From challenging me to push every idea that little bit further intellectually, to your constant encouragement and genuine investment in my research, I am truly appreciative of your support.

Secondly, I must extend my thanks to the four interviewees who agreed to take part in this study. Your honesty, your vulnerability and your willingness to share personal and sometimes painful experiences with me has not gone unrecognised. Your insights formed the heart of this dissertation's findings, and for that, I am incredibly grateful.

Thirdly, to my family. To my brother and dad for their sharp intellect, and for inspiring me to be better every day. And, of course, to my mum. For her unwavering support, the constant refills of coffee and her keen grammatical eye. I know you will be as pleased to see this dissertation in its completion as I am.

And finally, I wanted to dedicate this dissertation to my late Auntie Sue. An inspiration to so many, it is thanks to you that dance became such an integral part of my life. "You taught the future to dance," and I continue to miss you every day.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

World-renowned prima ballerina Sylvie Guillem once said: “Technical perfection is insufficient. It is an orphan without the true soul of the dancer” (Guillem, n.d). As a graduate of a British vocational ballet school, I would contend that possessing “soul” without “technical perfection” is equally insufficient. For myself, personally, the constant pursuit of excellence resulted in the development of perfectionist tendencies. And research shows that within ‘aesthetic sports’, or sports where emphasis is placed on physical appearance, such perfectionism is common amongst athletes (Krasnow et al., 1999; Nordin-Bates et al., 2011; Gittens, 2012; Dunn et al., 2011). Whilst several studies have quantitatively measured the impact of perfectionism on athletes’ performances, qualitative research within this area of psychology is less extensive (Farmer et al., 2017). Through a thematic analysis of four interviews conducted with United Kingdom (UK) vocational ballet school graduates, this paper aims to provide a narrative account of perfectionism, from the perspective of those experiencing it. Three themes emerged as a result of this analysis: external expectations, motivation and self-doubt/ fear of failure. By situating these themes within existing literature, this dissertation aims to answer the following two research questions: 1) *what factors do graduates perceive to have influenced the development or facilitation of their perfectionism?* and 2) *how adaptive or maladaptive do graduates perceive their perfectionism to be within their dance training?* The theme of external expectations will be applied to the first question, whilst the closely interrelated themes of motivation, self-doubt and fear of failure will be applied to the second. Overall, this dissertation is intended to supplement existing psychological studies by offering an insight into how dancers *perceive*

their own perfectionism, both in terms of its underlying causation and its impact on their performance.

The central findings of this study are that dancers attributed the development of their perfectionism to reasons of social pressure, for example from teachers or parents. Furthermore, it was discovered that participants recognised the maladaptive effects of perfectionism but remained unwilling to lower their standards, for fear this could negatively impact their performance. Thus, this study showcases the impressive self-awareness of ballet school graduates in *perceiving* their own perfectionism, despite their subsequent resistance to addressing it. Notably, attention will be drawn to the self-sustaining nature of perfectionism within ballet dancers and their insistence to frame this trait as beneficial within their dancing. It will be maintained, therefore, that an understanding of this problematic belief system should inform the work of practitioners attempting to tackle maladaptive perfectionism within vocational ballet school students in future.

1.2 Central Terminology and Concepts

Perfectionism is defined as the striving for flawlessness, alongside the setting of exceedingly high-performance standards and the tendency to overly criticise one's behaviour (Frost et al., 1990; Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Flett & Hewitt, 2002). Hewitt and Flett (1991) contended that perfectionism could be categorised based on its causation. Notably, they proposed the idea of self-oriented and socially-prescriptive perfectionism: the former developing when individuals set high standards for themselves, and the latter when high standards are set by others (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). Socially-prescribed perfectionism was also linked to a fear of letting others down (Hewitt & Flett, 1991).

By contrast, Rice and Preusser (2002) advocated for a different way of categorising perfectionism, one that was dependent on its impact. Effectively, they devised the Adaptive/Maladaptive Perfectionism Scale to quantify whether perfectionism was manifesting positively or negatively within individuals' lives (Rice & Preusser, 2002). Adaptive perfectionism, or healthy perfectionism, is characterised by someone holding themselves to high personal standards (known as 'perfectionist strivings') whilst possessing low perfectionist concern, for example over mistakes made or judgement from coaches (Dunn et al., 2011). Conversely, maladaptive perfectionism, or unhealthy perfectionism, is defined by the coalescence of these same high perfectionist strivings but with high perfectionist concerns, whether that be of making mistakes or anything which could be perceived as a personal 'failure' (Dunn et al., 2011). It has been contended that the Adaptive/ Maladaptive Perfectionism Scale actually overlaps with Hewitt & Flett's (1991) model, as self-oriented perfectionism aligns with markers of adaptiveness, whilst socially-prescribed perfectionism corresponds with maladaptive outcomes (Gotwals et al., 2012). Thus, the conclusion drawn from these two models must be that internally motivated perfectionism is healthier than externally imposed perfectionism. This inference will be used to inform the present study.

Chapter 2

Methodology

2.1 Participant selection and interview format

This dissertation utilises qualitative methods via semi-structured interviews with four UK vocational ballet school graduates to explore the causes behind their perfectionism and its impact on their dance training. A qualitative research approach was used to achieve a more nuanced and detailed narrative account than quantitative methods allowed (Roshan & Deeptee, 2009; Harper & Thompson, 2011).

A non-selective method was employed for recruiting interviewees. Specifically, a post was shared on a Facebook alumni forum for UK ballet school students explaining the purpose of the study and requesting volunteers who self-identified with the following definition of perfectionism: **“The tendency to demand of others or of oneself an extremely high or even flawless level of performance, in excess of what is required by the situation”** (American Psychological Association, 2015, 777). This self-identification method was chosen over formal perfectionism tests to shift focus away from objectively measuring the ‘severity’ of individuals’ perfectionism, to subjectively analysing participants’ interpretations of its impact. To this writer’s knowledge, to date, this perfectionist self-identification methodology has only been applied once before to the area of sports and performing arts. The study in question was authored by Hill et al. (2015) and explored perfectionist tendencies within professional athletes, dancers and musicians. Whilst the present study examines perfectionist tendencies within graduates of UK vocational ballet schools specifically, the same justification for this methodology applies. Notably, it enables the researcher to avoid the “assumptions of existing models” and to remain “unconstrained by pre-existing perspectives” (Hill et al., 2015, 238).

2.2 Demographics

The four interviewees in this study are vocational ballet school graduates with experiences spanning across four different UK dance schools. Three of the participants are female (Clara*, 22; Kimi*, 22; Jess*, 23), one is male (Ben*, 23)¹, and all are cisgender. Whilst featuring a relatively small sample size, something which has been critiqued for reasons of validity (Faber & Fonesca, 2014), this decision was purposefully taken to suit the narrative focus of the study. As Sandelowski (1996) contends, a small sample size lends itself to more in-depth and case-focused analysis. At the time of writing, three of the interviewees are still pursuing professional ballet careers, whilst the fourth, Clara, has decided to take an academic career path. All participants graduated from UK ballet schools between two and five years prior, having been enrolled in the period of 2010-2019. The decision to interview graduates, as opposed to current ballet school students, was made with the intention of eliciting the benefits of hindsight for deeper reflection. In Hill et al.'s (2015) study, an area flagged for future research was that of perfectionism in retired sportspeople, as the researchers proposed “the opportunity to reflect on experiences” may well provide retirees with more pertinent insights than those whose careers were still active (Hill et al., 2015, 249). The present study seeks to draw, in part, on this notion of reflection. Whilst three of the participants are still dancing, with Ben freelancing and both Kimi and Jess working alongside ballet companies, this study's focus is on their previous ballet school experiences. Thus, the benefits of hindsight may still be applied, particularly in the case of Clara, who chose to leave the dance world entirely.

¹All names and identifying data have been changed for reasons of anonymity. See Appendices I-V for full interview transcripts and question list.

It is worth noting that, due to the intimate nature of the ballet world, I was previously familiar with all four interviewees in a professional capacity, having performed together in different shows during my time in training. Thus, it must be noted that my personal experiences may play a role in the findings of this dissertation, rendering less detachment than someone outside the dance industry (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). However, McConnell-Henry et al. (2009) contend that interviewing those you know, on a subject you have personal experience of, can in fact enable deeper reflections. With trust and rapport already established, time can be utilised more effectively (McConnel-Henry et al: 2009). Thus, through my pre-existing relationship with participants, and my prior understanding of the dance industry, it can be asserted that an open and productive interview dynamic was facilitated.

Mention should also be made of the ethnicities represented in the study, with three of the participants being white and one, Kimi, being of Asian descent. It must be noted that this researcher would have liked to interview a more diverse and representative cohort, with a wider range of gender identities and ethnicities. However, the justification for this largely cisgender, white and female sample is that it is, unfortunately, reflective of the demographics of ballet schools and ballet companies more generally. Notably, ballet as an artform is extremely gender binary, with roles and choreography being devised to suit male or female dancers specifically. Whilst other styles of dance are beginning to experiment with concepts of gender, ballet remains tied to its traditionalist routes. Within this, Western European archetypes frame dance as a “primarily ‘female’ art form” (Risner: 2009, 58): a factor which discourages many young boys from taking it up. Furthermore, long-standing Eurocentric traditions have acted as barriers to access for people of colour who may want to pursue ballet into higher training or professionally (Tobin: 2020). Anecdotally, upon joining ballet school,

I found myself in a year of 27. Everyone in this year identified as cisgender, only seven of my peers were male, six of the students were Asian and the remaining 21 were white. And so, whilst this study would ideally be more representative, it is a sad reflection on the uniformity and prejudice of the ballet world that it is not.

2.3 Study structure and data analysis

After the interviews were conducted and transcribed verbatim, thematic analysis was applied to identify themes and patterns in the data. This analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) seminal work, utilising inductive and semantic coding in the pursuit of unbiased, rigorous results. Notably, over several iterations, codes were refined and reworked until three clear themes emerged: external expectations, motivation and self-doubt/ fear of failure. The latter two themes are grouped into one as interviewees tended to allude to both self-doubt and fear of failure concurrently. This dissertation will explore each individual theme within the context of the interviews, before grounding findings in wider literature to answer the proposed research questions. In the first chapter, the theme of external expectations will be explored, first in its interview context and then as a point of discussion in answer to the first research question (RQ1): *what factors do graduates perceive to have influenced the development or facilitation of their perfectionism?* After this, the second chapter will follow the same structure but with the strongly overlapping themes of motivation and self-doubt/ fear of failure. Findings will be used to answer the second research question (RQ2): *how adaptive or maladaptive do graduates perceive their perfectionism to be within their dance training?* Finally, conclusions will be drawn which tie all three themes together. It is worth reiterating that the aim of the present dissertation is to gain an insight into how subjects *perceive* their own perfectionism, rather than to gather objective data. There is a paucity of

research surrounding the intricacies of how individuals interpret their own perfectionism, as precedence is often given to more objective studies of this trait (Hill et al., 2015); thus, this dissertation seeks to bridge the gap between the two.

Chapter 3

External Expectations

This chapter seeks to explore the theme of external expectations, whilst also investigating its relevance to the development of perfectionism in UK vocational ballet school graduates.

3.1 Interview Findings

When asked what factors had contributed to the development or facilitation of their perfectionism, all four participants alluded to social pressure in some form. Whilst some focused on the standards set within ballet schools, for example by teachers or authority figures, others described experiencing pressure to overachieve from sources such as parents or peers. By presenting the key interview findings, and situating them within existing literature, the role of these pressures, or ‘external expectations’, in the development of perfectionism amidst ballet school students will be explored.

Ben explained how external expectations had fuelled the development of high standards within his own ballet school training: “Instead of trying to attain standards that you're setting yourself, you're attaining standards that are being set up for you.” “I started very early; I was at [fulltime vocational] dance school when I was 11... obviously I was too young to make my own choices”. This image of Ben being deprived of agency, autonomy and control from a young age is an important one, demonstrating the external standard-setting that was taking place. Ben went on to share that authority figures, such as teachers, would give what he terms “personal” and not “constructive criticism”. This included comments on “attributes that you can’t change physically, like the dancer’s weight at the time... about tone, about

conditioning, just how your body is built.” It became clear, therefore, that Ben perceived the exceedingly high standards imposed by those in power at dance school, including the need to attain a certain balletic physique to be deemed worthy of their attentions, as a catalyst for his perfectionism. And, despite other interviewees recounting familial pressures, a subtheme which will be explored further below, Ben seemed assured that he had fulfilled his parents’ expectations, saying: “I know for a fact that my own parents are extremely proud of me.” Combining Ben’s positive familial relationship with the knowledge that his dance teachers effectively took over his care from age 11, it can be concluded that his perfectionist tendencies likely developed as a result of expectations set by authority figures within ballet school.

Clara, who has since given up dance entirely, drew attention to another interesting facet of expectation-setting in dance schools. She recalled how one clear goal was imposed on students from the offset: “There is... a pressure to get a job ever since you’ve walked, or even set foot, in a ballet school... that’s the be-all and end-all in everyone’s mind.” This expectation to secure a job before graduation in the highly competitive dance industry was framed as “unrealistic” by Clara. By contrast, she shared that in her academic pursuits, she felt “like I’m achieving those goals that are set for me and they’re realistic goals”.

Significantly, Clara is highlighting not only the impact of external expectation-setting in general within ballet schools, but also the *unattainable* nature of the goals being set. It is clear, therefore, that external goal setting played a pivotal role in the development of Clara’s perfectionism, particularly as she was striving toward an outcome she viewed as “unrealistic”.

Kimi also spoke about the relationship between students and teachers within dance school, particularly in regard to criticism. She said: “I think you do just accept it. For me anyway, I just completely believed what everyone told me, especially if they were higher up.” This idea of unquestioning, total acceptance of the expectations and critiques imposed by authority figures in dance schools must be seen to play a role in the high rates of perfectionism within ballet dancers. Receiving constant reminders of your inadequacy, many of which may be criticisms that you are powerless to change as Ben maintains, would likely fuel the development of this trait. This sense of dissatisfaction was summarised by Kimi as she spoke about the after-effects of criticism: “Obviously, it's the after, isn't it, that you kind of feel like... you're worthless. You weren't good enough.” Jess also provided insight into the power structures established within high-level ballet schools: “You’re unaware that you actually have a voice, [but] even speaking out is a big enough step in itself because you're like 'I could get thrown out,' or whatever, or ‘what will they think about me?’” Evidently, the expectation is that students will meet the school’s high standards without question, or risk losing their place. It is not difficult to see how this pressure could generate perfectionist tendencies. Thus, the culture of silent acceptance within ballet schools and fear-driven veneration of teaching staff undoubtedly facilitates the development of perfectionism amongst students.

Jess, who is currently dancing in a national company, also raised issues of parental expectation: “My mum, sometimes, has made comments that make me think she doesn’t think I’m living up to my potential.” She also confided that thinking about how her dance school peers may view her now resulted in “almost like a layer of shame that I’m not doing solos... I’m still corps de ballet”.² Interestingly, Jess placed more weight on the expectations

² Being a corps de ballet member refers to a dancer making up the main ‘body’ of choreography who has not yet been promoted to a higher soloist role.

set by her family and peer group than her dance teachers. This implies that, whilst external expectation-setting plays an undeniable role in the development of perfectionism for ballet school students, the source of these expectations may alter from one person to the next. Finally, Kimi also spoke of the expectations imposed by her parents, alongside the importance of cultural influences, noting: “In Asia, the standards are very, very high, Parents expect a lot of you. Your society expects a lot from you.” Kimi’s need to overachieve being driven, in part, by the values of her home country only further supports the contention that the exact source of an individual’s perfectionism can vary wildly. However, with participants experiencing pressure from family, cultural factors, peers and authority figures alike, these influences can all be grouped under the broader theme of ‘external expectations’. Thus, it must be concluded that all four participants perceived external expectations to be the leading factor in the development of their perfectionism.

3.2 Discussion and RQ1

What factors do graduates perceive to have influenced the development and facilitation of perfectionism?

Earlier in this dissertation, attention was drawn to Hewitt and Flett’s (1991) model of socially-prescribed and self-oriented perfectionism. Making reference to this model, Cumming and Duda’s (2012) study of UK vocational dance students discovered that, rather than setting high personal standards for themselves, over half of their 194 research subjects were experiencing perfectionism driven by high levels of concern about negative social evaluation,. This finding fits with the theme of ‘external expectations’ presented above, as pressures imposed by dance staff, parents, peers or one’s culture would all fall under the bracket of ‘social evaluation’. Furthermore, it also demonstrates an impressive self-awareness

on the part of participants, as all four graduates drew attention to the role external expectations played in the development of their perfectionism, without knowing there was also a plethora of objective data to substantiate their intuitions.

More specifically, studies on the development of perfectionism in young people have drawn attention to factors such as parental perfectionism, strict or authoritarian parenting styles and concerns over receiving negative judgement (Neumeister, 2004). Evidently, these findings are still in-keeping with the thematic analysis above, with all four participants expressing concerns about negative judgement, alongside Jess and Kimi referencing parental pressure specifically. However, the idea of ‘authoritarian parenting styles’ requires further exploration with regard to culture. Notably, Kawamura (1999) found that Asian-American students were more likely to be perfectionists than their Caucasian counterparts. Her research concluded that Asian families tended to employ stricter parenting styles, placing more pressure on their children to achieve. As a result, Asian-American children were more likely to equate success with “the pride, honor and happiness of their parents” than Caucasian children of the same age (Kawamura, 1999, 7). However, Kawamura also recognised that the children of particularly authoritarian Caucasian parents were similarly vulnerable to increased perfectionism. Analysing these findings in line with Kimi’s and Jess’ statements above, therefore, it can be concluded that parenting style and cultural factors most likely did play a key role in the facilitation and development of their perfectionism, just as both interviewees perceived they had.

However, consideration must also be given to a counterargument: the contention that dancers’ perfectionism is self-oriented not socially-prescribed and develops as a result of a personal desire for success, not due to external expectations. Interestingly, this was the

conclusion drawn in the study by Hill et al. (2015) referenced earlier, as the researchers found perfectionism to be more internally motivated amongst their sample of athletes, dancers and musicians. Nevertheless, it is here that problems arise with Hill et al.'s (2015) methodology, as the study offers one conclusion for sportspeople, musicians and dancers alike.

Undoubtedly, there are distinct influences and pressures acting on ballet dancers as there are acting on professional hockey players. It cannot be maintained, therefore, that the same factors influence the development of perfectionism in both sports. With only four of fifteen participants in the study being dancers, and only three of these specialising in ballet, it is likely the results were skewed to underrepresent the social evaluation so common in dance. Traditionalist and rigid power structures within ballet schools set them aside from other sporting environments. Carmichael (2018, 5) corroborates this, contending that Western dance training follows "authoritarian pedagogical practices," characterized by "an amalgamation of fear and admiration for teachers", alongside "a climate of obedience without question". Further support for this claim can be drawn from the thematic analysis above, as all four participants acknowledged the importance of meeting expectations set by authority figures within ballet schools. Thus, whilst Hill et al.'s (2015) study provided a strong basis for this research paper, it must be concluded that external expectations and social evaluation, not personal strivings for success, were the leading cause of perfectionism for participants in this study.

To conclude this chapter, whilst there are, undoubtedly, a multitude of interacting reasons for why perfectionism is so prevalent within ballet school students, the present study found strong support for the influence of external expectation-setting. This included the hierarchical, authoritarian structure of the ballet world, the constant comparison to peers, the high standards set by parents, and in some cases, a cultural emphasis on achievement.

Together, these expectations work in tandem to create an environment which is optimal for both the development of this personality style and the facilitation of pre-existing low-level perfectionist tendencies amongst students.

Chapter 4

Motivation, Self-Doubt, and Fear of Failure

4.1 Interview findings: motivation

When asked what they perceived to be the benefits of perfectionism, all four interviewees alluded to its ability to enhance motivation and push them to achieve their goals. However, participants also demonstrated an awareness of the negative impact of this ‘need’ to overwork, framing it as a necessary evil in the pursuit of success. For example, Ben aptly portrayed the duality of perfectionism when he commented that it acts as a “motivator, but... a motivator with a cost... so you keep going, but you will eventually burnout.” Despite recognising the maladaptive aspects of perfectionism, Ben still praised the trait, commenting: “my perfectionism has helped me do better than I thought I could.” The dichotomy in Ben’s thinking must be observed here, as he both acknowledges that a drive dependent on perfectionism is unsustainable in the long-term, but simultaneously values its ability to aid his performance in the short-term. Similarly, Kimi admitted that her motivation was dependent upon her perfectionism, claiming that without it: “you’re not going to get anywhere... it’s made me not give up.” This statement also exhibits a dichotomous, all-or-nothing thinking pattern, as Kimi credits her perfectionism for being the only thing stood between herself and failure. Thus, an almost symbiotic relationship between motivation, self-doubt and fear of failure is established. By crediting her perfectionism for her motivation and work ethic, Kimi becomes unwilling to lower her standards at the risk of becoming lethargic or apathetic. Thus, she never proves to herself that she can function without her perfectionism, meaning her self-doubt and fear of failure are maintained.

In seeking to understand whether ballet school graduates viewed their perfectionism as adaptive or maladaptive, it seemed conducive to ask whether interviewees would lower their standards if given the choice. In answer to this question, Ben, Kimi and Jess all said they would choose to maintain their high levels of perfectionism. Conversely, Clara said she would like to lower her standards but struggled to do so. This finding is particularly interesting, as Clara was the only interviewee no longer pursuing a professional dance career. This raises the possibility that perfectionism is, perhaps, only perceived as adaptive within the detail-oriented and highly competitive domain of ballet. As Clara contended, “I think it is generally that the persona of a ballet dancer is to be perfectionist... if there's a finger out of line, if there's a toe out of line... all the minute details all lead to perfectionism.” Outside of dance, however, it could be argued that this obsession with detail becomes far less beneficial, rendering Clara to view her perfectionism as more maladaptive. Jess provides further support for this argument when she commented: “It's weird because it's almost like, for now, I know that it helps. So, it's like I do recognise that while I'm in this, I can't just let go. I can't. But I look forward to the day when I decide to stop with ballet.” Jess even went so far as to describe this hypothetical future where she lowers her perfectionist standards after ballet as “the Promised Land”. This image is particularly significant. It shows Jess is self-aware that outside of a dance context, the so-called ‘benefits’ of perfectionism lose some of their value and unhealthy effects begin to outweigh healthy ones. Nevertheless, her refusal to lower her standards whilst still dancing professionally demonstrates the immense sacrifice she is willing to make in pursuit of success. She acknowledges that “when you do ballet... it has to be... the first thing in your life”. Thus, it can be surmised that Jess valued the motivational benefits of perfectionism within her dancing too greatly to consider lowering her standards. So much so that she was prepared to endure the maladaptive effects it generated in other areas of her life.

In conclusion, therefore, the participants of this study appeared to view perfectionism's motivational qualities as adaptive within their ballet training. Despite its maladaptive drawbacks, perfectionism was seen to provide vital protection against greater evils, such as apathy and reduced achievement. However, it was also noted that, outside of a dance context, the motivational benefits of perfectionism were not considered sufficient to outweigh its more maladaptive effects.

4.2 Interview Findings: Self-Doubt and Fear of Failure

The final theme to emerge from participant interviews was one of self-doubt and a fear of failure. These two topics are being addressed as one overall theme because they are very much interlinked. The first way in which participants commonly exhibited self-doubt was through self-comparison to their peers. Ben summarised this sense of inadequacy when he said, "you compare yourself to other people, people that I trained with... you have that expectation and when you see other people living the dream, working with the company or companies that you would sell your soul to be working with, it can be tough." Undoubtedly, such comparison must be seen as a maladaptive outcome of perfectionism as it fuels a vicious cycle: comparison forces dancers to confront their imperfections, driving an individual to overwork in order to bring themselves in line with their high standards, before further comparison takes place in order to reassess the progress made. Jess summed this up in her simple admission that dancers are always striving to "do better" than their peers.

Furthermore, in Kimi's case, self-doubt, and even genuine distress, were evident after she watched back her final year audition video and found it did not meet the high standards she set for herself: "I was mortified, I was horrified at what I saw, because I just thought it was

terrible in all aspects. Really, you know, I didn't see any good.” This particular quote clearly demonstrates the power of hindsight in recognising maladaptive perfectionist behaviours like self-criticism. As time passed, Kimi was able to identify the unreasonable standards she had imposed on herself, even stating “it took me a year, at least a year, to look back... and I was able to accept and acknowledge... that it wasn't all that bad. And actually, it was quite good in some places.” In this way, the danger of perfectionism to skew perceptions and generate self-doubt in the present moment becomes clear. Thus, Kimi's revelation demonstrates how the passage of time can enable dancers to challenge high expectations and rationalise the self-doubt impeding on their lives. In a similar way, Clara showed the same reflectiveness when recalling the self-doubt that she experienced in performance and exam situations: “I didn't have the self-confidence in myself to believe that I could deliver something within those assessments that I would be proud of.” Thus, the link between perfectionism and self-doubt in ballet school students is clearly established; however, it can be contended that these doubts only became clear to students with the benefit of hindsight and meaningful self-reflection.

Building on this further, particular attention should be drawn to Jess' case, whereby self-doubt can be seen to morph into full-fledged imposter syndrome. Jess said, “I may not be that talented, but I will work harder than everyone else.” Jess possessed the belief that her ‘lack of talent’ should be compensated through overworking, despite securing a contract with a prestigious national ballet company upon graduating. Interestingly, however, Jess showed great self-awareness of this inability to recognise her own achievements. She made direct reference to her “impostor syndrome”, citing that “maybe, the more hard on yourself you are, or the less you think you are successful, the more objectively successful you are”. In this way, Jess appears to be framing self-doubt as a kind of survival mechanism within dance. Just as the motivation derived from perfectionism was perceived to prevent dancers ‘giving

up', the self-doubt stemming from that same perfectionism is perceived to prevent dancers becoming complacent. Kimi also alluded to this idea of impostor system, albeit more implicitly. She explained how ballet school students present a perfect "image" of themselves, almost as a way of keeping up appearances and preventing others realising how inadequate they really feel:

"If you let that guard down for even just one day, that could be the day that you show something you don't want to show. And if someone sees something, that could be the end... okay, not the end, but that can really change someone's perspective on you, which is the last thing you want."

And so, both Jess and Kimi exhibited self-doubt in the form of impostor syndrome, as they felt the need to conceal their perceived incompetency regardless of their objective success. Furthermore, there is evidently a certain level of catastrophic, dichotomous thinking being presented by Kimi here, as she frames a simple mishap, or mistake, as "the end". This cognitive catastrophising links into the second facet of this theme: fear of failure.

The fear of failure expressed by interviewees is captured in a recollection from Clara: "If there's a tiny setback which isn't impacting my success as a whole and it doesn't really complicate anything... that's a complete failure to me and I don't think I'm succeeding at all." The all-or-nothingness of Clara's attitudes toward mistake-making is notable. Effectively, Clara's belief system upholds that anything but total, one hundred percent perfectionism must be labelled a failure. The maladaptive nature of this belief is evident, not least because Clara found it drained all enjoyment from her dance school experiences and ultimately, provided the impetus for her giving up and pursuing academics. A quote from Ben further emphasised the impact of this all-or-nothing attitude in regard to failure. Interestingly, however, Ben's

comment pertains to a non-dance related ‘failure’, instead addressing his decision to withdraw from an academic course which did not suit him: “I took it quite hard, even though it was the right choice for me. It was kind of like, 'oh you're a failure.'” With this dissertation focusing only on the impact of perfectionism within participants’ dance training, Ben’s reflections provide stimulus for further research into the pervasiveness of perfectionism, particularly the themes of self-doubt and fear of failure, into other areas of dancers’ lives.

Thus, in sum, these reflections demonstrate how perfectionism can manifest maladaptively in the dance training of UK vocational ballet school students. Particular attention was drawn to the issues of self-doubt, especially in the form of imposter syndrome, and fear of failure, which became evident in examples of all-or-nothing and dichotomous thinking. It was also contended that the benefit of hindsight proved instrumental in enabling participants to rationalise self-concerns and recognise when they were being governed by unrealistic expectations.

4.3 Discussion and RQ2

How adaptive or maladaptive do graduates perceive their perfectionism to be within their dance training?

It must be noted that, without quantifiable measures, it is near impossible to comment on the exact extent to which perfectionism is adaptive or maladaptive within sport or dance (Hill et al., 2015). Thus, instead, this dissertation’s goal is to determine how healthy or unhealthy participants *perceive* perfectionism to be within their training. In order to do this, the themes of motivation and self-doubt/ fear of failure will be applied in turn.

Within interviews, the theme of motivation was identified by participants as a beneficial and adaptive byproduct of perfectionism. This contention is, in fact, supported by the work of Frost et al. (1993, 121), who found that perfectionism, when self-oriented, was correlated with what is known as ‘positive affect’, or “feelings of energy, enthusiasm and activity”. However, as has been contended above, both this study and existing literature find dancers’ perfectionism to be socially-prescribed not self-oriented; thus, these same benefits do not apply. In fact, Frost et al. (1993) concluded that socially-prescribed perfectionism correlates with ‘negative affect’, characterised by “feelings of anger, fear, guilt etc.”. And so, whilst those dancers driven by their own high standards may find some adaptive benefits in perfectionism, the vast majority of dancers, being susceptible to expectations imposed by others, will find perfectionism manifesting negatively within their training. In fact, Nordin-Bates et al. (2017) contended that Frost and colleagues’ findings are too generous, maintaining that regardless of whether an individual’s high expectations are self-imposed or socially prescribed, perfectionism always has some maladaptive impact. Specifically, Nordin-Bates et al. (2017) found that perfectionists, in general, were more at risk of burnout than their non-perfectionist counterparts. There is almost a sad irony in this revelation: as ballet school students believe being a perfectionist will result in increased motivation, the reality is that “the least perfectionist were also the least exhausted” (Nordin-Bates et al., 2017, 120). This means the dancers striving for the greatest success and setting themselves the highest standards are the ones unwittingly chipping away at their motivation and pushing themselves closer to burnout. Two further studies by Hall & Hill (2012) and Lemyre et al. (2008) came to similar conclusions. Thus, this highlights a notable contradiction between the attitudes held by subjects in this study, who perceived perfectionism to have motivational benefits which safeguard against poor performance, and quantitative research, which indicates quite the

reverse. It can be concluded, therefore, that graduates did perceive perfectionism as adaptive and helpful within their training, but this viewpoint is ill-informed and, potentially, quite harmful.

Nevertheless, an exploration of the second theme, self-doubt and fear of failure, proves that graduates were aware of some of the maladaptive effects of perfectionism. At different points in their interviews, every participant demonstrated an understanding of problematic beliefs they held that were borne out of their perfectionism. A number of these beliefs came under the umbrella of self-doubt, or fear of failure and mistake-making. In a mixed-method study of perfectionism in professional ballet dancers, Gittens (2015) made the same finding, noting that dancers scored very highly in the perfectionist dimensions of self-doubt (or Doubt About Actions [DAA]) and fear of failure (or Concern Over Mistakes [COM]). And so, the similarities between the present qualitative study and Gittens' (2015) quantitative analysis are significant, as they imply the present subjects self-diagnosed their unhealthy tendencies with immense accuracy. Effectively, they successfully identified the ways in which dancers' perfectionism is *expected* to manifest maladaptively, demonstrating an impressive level of self-awareness and reflection.

Furthermore, Jess and Kimi both referenced this idea of 'impostor syndrome' and a fear of revealing one's own inadequacy as a dancer: the former doing so explicitly, and the latter more implicitly. Formally titled the 'Imposter Phenomenon', this sense of "alleged incompetence" and fear of being "exposed as a 'fraud'" is recognised in psychology (Clance, 1985; Pannhausen et al., 2022, 888). Significantly, it has been shown to correlate with two perfectionist dimensions in particular, those of self-doubt (DAA) and fear of failure (COM):

the two dimensions Gittens found ballet dancers scored very highly in (Pannhausen et al., 2022; Gittens, 2015). Impressively, interviewees had, once again, demonstrated an almost instinctive understanding of the maladaptive effects expected to arise as a result of their perfectionism. Despite lacking the knowledge as to *why* they felt the way they did, participants accurately identified and articulated the negative impact of their own high standards in a way that aligned with the findings of previous studies. In this way, it must be maintained that graduates do not perceive perfectionism in black and white terms, believing it has neither a completely healthy, nor entirely unhealthy impact on their dance training. In fact, interviewees demonstrated an impressive grasp of the ‘double-edged sword’ analogy commonly associated with perfectionism (Stoeber, 2014).

However, even with this balanced understanding, three of four interviewees still maintained they would not lower their high standards if given the choice. This was despite all four participants admitting their life satisfaction would increase if their perfectionism ratings fell. And so, to truly understand how adaptive or maladaptive dancers perceive perfectionism to be within their training, the following question must be asked: why do dancers continue to cling to perfectionism even when they are aware of its maladaptive effects? Ramsey & Ramsey (2002, 1) provide an answer in their work on the “catch-22” of perfectionism, arguing that it is the rigid “worldview” of perfectionists, who opt to prioritise task performance over all else, that results in this resistance to lower standards. The reason being, they contend, is that perfectionists fear lowering their standards may simultaneously engender a fall in attainment (Ramsay & Ramsay, 2002, 9).

Chapter 5

Conclusion

In conclusion, it must be surmised that the *cause* of ballet school students' perfectionism ultimately dictates the *impact* that same perfectionism has within their training. Specifically, in the present study, the development of ballet school students' perfectionism was attributed to the influence of external expectations. As evidenced in previous studies, this 'socially-prescribed perfectionism' is exceedingly problematic. Consequently, it was found to be linked to a plethora of maladaptive effects in Research Question 2, including decreased motivation, increased risk of burnout, strong self-doubt and an irrational fear of failure. Thus, in its simplest terms, it can be contended that the findings of Research Question 1 informed the findings of Research Question 2, and it is only through this convergent analysis across themes that the full picture of students' perfectionism can be understood.

However, there is another key finding from this present study worthy of a final mention. This must be the fact that the three interviewees still actively pursuing dance careers perceived their perfectionism to play an adaptive role in their training. So much so that all three would opt to maintain their high perfectionist standards if given the choice, even having recognised the maladaptive effects it posed in other areas of their lives. The reason for this was that participants considered the motivational benefits of perfectionism to be so valuable that they outweighed any concurrent mental health implications. This finding proves that a truly harmful and inaccurate misconception may be underlying the unwillingness of ballet dancers to lower their unattainably high standards. Thus, going forward, practitioners seeking to address the prevalence of maladaptive perfectionism in ballet school students should begin by

disproving the false assumption that perfectionism increases motivation. By revealing to students that their perfectionism could actually be fuelling early burnout, quite the opposite of the increased motivation they desire, practitioners may be able to persuade students to experiment with lowering their standards. Subsequently, this could have suffusive positive effects on students' self-doubt and fears of failure, as they come to realise lowering their standards did not equate to some catastrophic "end", where you "show something you don't want to show," as Kimi feared it might.

And finally, of course, in the long-term, idealistic calls can be made to alter the rigid power structures within ballet schools. By addressing the unhealthy dominance of external expectation-setting and restoring some autonomy to students by enabling them to choose their own goals, perhaps a shift could be made, away from the prevalence of socially-prescribed perfectionism towards more self-oriented, high-achieving dancer cohorts. However, the traditions of the ballet world are strong, and, for more immediate effect, it feels judicious to focus on changing the way students *respond* to this environment, rather than attempting to alter the environment itself. In this way, students at UK vocational ballet schools could develop more adaptive perfectionist behaviours than the current participant sample.

And so, it is hoped that the findings of this paper may provide useful insights to those currently enrolled in UK vocational ballet schools, alongside those having already graduated. Perhaps, it may aid individuals like Ben, Clara, Kimi and Jess to better understand the flawed belief systems underpinning the perfectionist standards they maintain in their day-to-day lives and provide some encouragement for those hesitant about changing them.

Wordcount: 6996

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See next page for Appendices.

Appendices

Appendix I: Interview Question List

1. Do you identify with the following definition of the term ‘perfectionism’?

“The tendency to demand of others or of oneself an extremely high or even flawless level of performance, in excess of what is required by the situation” (American Psychological Association, 2015, 777).

2. So, would you describe yourself as a perfectionist – yes, or no?
3. Prior to dance school, can you remember ever setting very high standards for yourself or expecting more from yourself than the situation perhaps demanded?
4. **For those identifying as perfectionists:** Do you think your dance school training is responsible for generating your perfectionist tendencies?
 - a) If yes, what specific aspects of the dance training environment do you think push students to set such high expectations for themselves?
 - b) If no, do you think your dance school training has in anyway facilitated your already existing perfectionist tendencies. If yes, how so?

For those not identifying as perfectionists: In an environment where students are known to be disproportionately vulnerable to perfectionism, why do you think you did not develop such tendencies?
5. **For those identifying as perfectionists:** How do you think being a perfectionist has impacted on your training and relationship with dance, for example in appraisals, auditions or any other areas?

For those not identifying as perfectionists: How do you think not being a perfectionist has impacted on your training and relationship with dance, for example in appraisals, auditions or any other areas?
6. At dance school, how did you find you responded to criticism from teachers or those in authority or even parents?
7. Since leaving dance school, how have you found you respond to criticism from those around you – whether they be those in authority or just friends or colleagues?
8. How do you think the standards you set for yourself compare to the standards your peers set for themselves? Is it similar or do you find any difference?
9. Do you think that perfectionism or your lack of perfectionism has helped or hindered you in any other areas of your life, outside of dance school for example work, friendships or romantic relationships? Can you give some examples of both, or whichever is relevant?
10. What is your relationship to success? Do you believe you succeed as much as, more than, or less than your peers?
11. Do you think others would view you as successful – would your family or others who know you view you as objectively successful?
12. What do you think are the benefits of perfectionism? Have you felt any of these personally? AND What do you think are the pitfalls of perfectionism? Have you felt any of these personally?
13. Do you feel that you have maintained strong friendships in your time since leaving dance school? Old or new.

14. Do you feel that you have had any meaningful romantic relationships in your time since leaving dance school?
15. If someone spoke to your closest friends and family, do you think they would describe you as a perfectionist?
16. If someone spoke to your close friends and family, what five words would they use to honestly describe you? Please be as genuine as you possibly can.
17. Do you ever wish you could set lower standards for yourself or, if given the choice, would you continue to be a perfectionist or maybe even set higher standards for yourself and strive for even greater perfectionism?
18. If you could change anything in the dance world/ dance schools which you think would foster less perfectionist tendencies – what would it be?
19. Do you think it's possible that you could lower your perfectionist standards with time?
20. When thinking back on certain experiences we have spoken about, do you experience any specific emotions? Nostalgia. Regret. Anger. Happiness. Sadness. Guilt. Or anything else?
21. Do you think your memory and recollection of these experiences is accurate or has in anyway been impacted over the years, whether that be to view the memories more negatively or positively than you may have done when living through them?
 - a) If yes, why do you think this would be? Do you think it is natural for your memories to change as you process them with time?
22. How would you rate your overall life satisfaction since leaving dance school?
23. Do you think this life satisfaction would improve at all if your perfectionism rating fell?
24. Is there anything else you would like to add or mention?

Appendix II: Zoom Interview with Clara

Time/ Date: 8:50 pm 22 March 2022

Interviewer [I]

Hi Clara*, thank you so much for joining me today it's really lovely to have you.

Clara [C]

No, thank you for inviting me along.

[I] Of course! So, I thought that we could basically start running through some of the informed consent form. I thought I'd read the whole thing to you if that's okay and then you can literally say to me at the end, "yes", if you're happy for it to go ahead.

[C] Of course, yes, that's fine.

[I] Amazing. So, it says: I confirm that the purpose of the study has been explained and that I have understood it. So, as I've said, the study is looking at perfectionism in graduates from UK vocational dance schools, specifically ballet schools. And we're effectively going to just do an interview today and explore whether you think this perfectionism impacted on your life as a dancer and potentially beyond as well. The next areas of consent are: I have had the opportunity to ask questions and they have been successfully answered. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time, without giving a reason and without consequence. I understand that all data are anonymous and that there will not be any connection between the personal information provided and the data. I understand that there are no known risks or hazards associated with participating in this study. I confirm that I have read and understood the above information and that I agree to participate in this study. And I confirm that I am over 16 years of age.' Is all of that okay with you?

[C] Yes, absolutely fine.

[I] Amazing. And then just two more questions are: I consent to my data being transcribed and wish to be referred to anonymously in written forms of dissemination. And I consent to my audio/video files of participation being used for research purposes only, including the written articles where all identifying data will be removed.

[C] Yes. I consent. Absolutely fine.

[I] Brilliant, okay, on that note then, we can launch into the interview questions. I will just get those up now. You've also had a chance to look over the privacy notice and data protection notice, as well, that I sent over, haven't you?

[C] Yes, I've had a read through that, that's absolutely fine as well.

[I] Perfect. In that case, we'll launch straight in. And my first question is simply: Do you identify with the following definition of the term 'perfectionism'? And the definition is: "The tendency to demand of others or of oneself an extremely high or even flawless level of performance, in excess of what is required by the situation". So, would you say you agree with that?

[C] I'm going to say I most definitely do, yes.

[I] Sure, okay, so, that leads me straight into my next question, which is basically: Would you describe yourself as a perfectionist, therefore, yes, or no? Point blank.

[C] Yes, I would.

[I] Yes, sure. So, in that case, prior to dance school, can you remember ever setting very high standards for yourself or expecting more from yourself than the situation perhaps demanded? So, before you'd even ever set foot in the ballet environment, do you think you showed perfectionist tendencies?

[C] No, I don't. I don't think I embodied those tendencies at all before I stepped foot in a dance school.

[I] Really, and do you have any vivid memories which might explain that or kind of show that, or is it just a feeling?

[C] No, I do. So, I performed with [insert name of ballet company] in a run for maybe two years. I think, was it two... maybe one year. I performed with them anyway, prior to going to ballet school, and I remember enjoying it. And even though I was young, I didn't expect much of myself. I went there to enjoy myself and I went there to dance. That was kind of imposed upon me by my parents - you enjoy it, you love doing it and it was enjoyment. There were never these high standards for me to have to achieve anything - that I had to do this, or I had to achieve that. So, I think definitely it came down to going to dance school, to vocational school.

[I] Sure, and with that question in mind, it leads me to simply ask: Do you think your dance school training is responsible for generating your perfectionist tendencies, therefore? And, if yes, what specific aspects of the dance training environment do you think push students to set such high expectations for themselves?

[C] I think, in my mind, it was the constant comparison with other individuals within a year group. I know that it's always going to be the case in the dance industry, however, I just think that for myself this, kind of, started and ignited these perfectionist tendencies because I was constantly comparing myself to other people. I never felt 'good enough', you know, in comparison to other people, and I think you never felt like what you were achieving was enough. You always felt like you needed to be achieving more to be this perfect or idealised dancer and I think that's where it really kicked off. Even from a young age, you're compared to the eleven other dancers, or however many there are in the room.

[I] Sure. And how do you think being a perfectionist has impacted on your training and relationship with dance, for example in relation to appraisals or auditions or any other specific areas?

[C] I think it impacted me personally, like you say, appraisals or you know exams, anything like that, because I didn't have the self-confidence to believe in myself that I could deliver something within those assessments that I could be proud of. And I think that was... I carried that from a very young age, maybe not year seven and eight, so not when I was 11 or 12, but certainly after when I was 13, 14, 15, when it kind of sunk in more.

[I] Yeah.

[C] And that's... I never believed in myself. I never thought I was 'good enough' it's going back to that thing. And I think, you're nit-picking at everything, nothing's ever good enough in your own mind. So you go into that room, you're being assessed, and you feel so underconfident that you're not even giving yourself the opportunity to perform at your best.

[I] No, yes, I can completely understand that. And that feeling of you know, if you have such high expectations, it means that you're inevitably never going to actually be able to meet them and it's constantly kind of knocking you down. At dance school, then, how did you find yourself responding to criticism from teachers or those in authority - did you feel like your perfectionism in anyway impacted that?

[C] I think, sometimes. It all depended on what or how I felt at that moment in time, whether I visibly saw myself doing well, or I visibly saw myself not doing as well. If it was criticism in terms of reaching those high standards, I think I was very negative at points because I would be just - well, I can't achieve it, or it's not working. And, like you say, I would be setting myself these really high standards. And I would be achieving them at times. However, the criticism never felt like I was. So, I was just constantly battling between, 'okay I'm setting myself this, but 'this is the critique'. Sometimes I would take it and, you know, it would help me. And then other times, I would be in a negative mindset anyway and it would just spiral, because it's the constant battle of trying to achieve something and I just don't feel like I'm doing that.

[I] Sure, no, absolutely. And, since leaving dance school, you've told me that you've pursued a different route at university, which is obviously incredibly impressive. Since leaving dance school, therefore, how have you found you respond to criticism from those around you – whether that be those in authority or friends or colleagues?

[C] I think my relationship with responding to criticism is a lot better now. And I would purely put that down to the fact that I have removed myself from the dancing industry. I think that's important to note. However, responding to criticism, I still take it quite negatively sometimes, because, like I said, I'm trying to achieve these high standards. I have very high standards for myself. And, once someone's critiquing me, I feel attacked almost that I'm not good enough or I'm not achieving enough. And I think, it's not as frequent as it was. I can rationalise with myself at times and go 'okay, they're not critiquing me personally, they're critiquing a piece of work or they're helping me,' you know? They're trying to help me here. However, in the ballet world, I think it is important to note, you take it very personally - or I did anyway. The critique, the high standards you're setting, the critique that's constantly coming for you, you're taking it very personally. Because it's about you and your body and everything like that.

[I] Sure, yes, I think that makes perfect sense, especially once you've gone through something for an extended period of time. So, when you leave the situation, I guess it doesn't necessarily mean you

leave the feelings behind. So, I guess my question is: How do you think the standards you set for yourself compare to the standards your peers set for themselves? Do you think that actually, it's quite similar or do you see any very obvious differences? And that could be, peers within dance school, or peers outside of dance school. Do you kind of feel like you're in a similar space to them or not?

[C] I think, it depends on each scenario. Now I look at it, I think some of my expectations are very unrealistic in comparison to some that my peers set for me. And I'm almost trying to overachieve rather than achieve what's required of me to do. I'm trying to go above and beyond constantly.

[I] Yeah.

[C] I think in the ballet world. There was almost, I'm going to say, a pressure to get a job ever since you've walked, or even set foot, in a ballet school. You're pressured to get a job, and that's the be all and end all in everyone's mind. And yes, I think you can say yourself and your peers are kind of on the same level in terms of what you're trying to achieve because you have to. However, they're very high standards... it's easier for me to look at it now, but you have to look at everybody who's trying to get a job in the ballet world. It's like the real world but it feels more pressured there. And that thought to me now feels more unrealistic than anything whereas in an academic career, I feel like I'm achieving those goals that are set for me and they're realistic goals, and it's just myself that's putting extra burden on me for my high expectations. So, I can kind of level out with that now; however, previously, several years ago, I wasn't able to level out with that as a ballet dancer.

[I] Sure. That's a really interesting answer. And that leads me to ask you: Do you think your perfectionism has impacted other areas of your life outside of dance? Do you think it's impacted, for example, friendships or romantic relationships? And, if so, could you maybe give some examples or some experiences of both if you're comfortable doing so?

[C] Yeah. No of course. I think in friendships, for sure. It's an interesting point. I kind of set this high expectation of a friendship that I like, and I like other people, to fulfil. And I know I can't impose my views on other people, despite how much I would like to have a friendship that goes two ways, as that's a high expectation I'm setting for the individual without even telling them, so I think that's my perfectionism within my friendships. I like to set myself high goals in a friendship - to be available constantly, to reply and do this and do that. It's unrealistic. And to put that burden on someone else when we've all got our own stresses in life and we're all busy, I think that shows a perfectionist quality in my friendships. Romantic relationships... yes, again, I would say that I set a high expectation that someone should know what I'm thinking straight away and be able to adapt to any given situation - if I'm upset, if I'm this or that. Maybe this is more of a reflection on me, but nothing can ever go wrong in my romantic relationships. I have this fear of something going wrong or that I'm going to be rejected. So, I think these perfectionist tendencies have really impacted on these relationships and I'm setting myself unrealistic goals. I know I don't need to, but I feel like I have to.

[I] 100%. That makes a lot of sense. Which leads me to ask you: What is your relationship to success? Do you think that you are succeeding more or less than your peers? Or do you even think about success in that way?

[C] I think I'm so eager to succeed. However, if there's a tiny setback which isn't impacting my success as a whole and it doesn't really complicate anything, it's just a tiny setback in a career move, that's a complete failure to me and I don't think I'm succeeding at all when, in fact, I am. But in that moment in time, and for days after, I've failed. Like, I chose to step away from the ballet world even though I'd graduated with a job, and it was my positive choice to step away. That's still a failure; it's

not a success in my mind. And despite the years of work and effort and dedication and training and everything and sacrifices, I was never deemed perfect, or I never achieved what I wanted to achieve perfectly. I was a failure. So, I think, massively, this has impacted my relationship with what I deem as success and what I've achieved and not achieved. And I would agree that yes, massively, it has.

[I] It's interesting to hear you say that you never achieved your idea of success when, actually, you did achieve a job in the ballet world and actually you did achieve some of those goals that you set for yourself. Do you think potentially an outsider, a family member or a friend, would objectively describe you as successful? Do you think that, to others, you would be considered as a quote-on-quote successful individual?

[C] I think, yes, I think so. I definitely think so. I think just adding onto that point - some people in the ballet world wouldn't deem me as successful, but peers close to myself, you know my peers, my family, my boyfriend, would deem me as successful. But then whose opinion would matter more in that environment? And I think that's what contributes to my idea of feeling: 'I have failed' or 'I am a failure' rather than being a success.

[I] Sure, so you deem more weight onto the negative opinion, is that what you're saying?

[C] Yes.

[I] Sure, that's interesting. And then, I guess I wanted to ask you what you think actually could be the benefits of perfectionism, if there are any? And whether you think you've felt any of these personally if so?

[C] Yeah. I do a lot of [voluntary] work as well as studying a X degree and I think this is a good example of it. It's not enough now. People are very satisfied to just do a degree. However, I like to strive for more. And I think these high expectations and being a perfectionist mean I am constantly pushing myself to achieve the most I can. And I think I'm constantly trying to do more, to be more successful, or just to see myself as more successful. I'm never just settling for anything. I'm constantly just trying my best to keep going and keep pushing and to try and achieve everything I can. I think that's really important.

[I] Sure, absolutely. And then, on the flipside of that, what do you think the pitfalls of perfectionism are? And do you think you've experienced any of those personally? I know we've touched on quite a lot of them, but can you summarise the main few pitfalls or do you think any have impacted on your own life?

[C] I think in ballet, the stepping away from the career massively. However, I also think, even if it's just day to day, like a university grading for example, if it's not a high 70 or it's a 69, that's deemed as a failure in my mind. When it's completely not, but it is to me. If things don't add up the way I want them to, or if I've worked really hard on something and the result or report comes back as negative, I immediately take that the wrong way. And by no means have I failed, but I have in my own mind. And that's something I'm trying to work through, but I don't think I ever fully will.

[I] Yeah. And my questions are now moving into relationships since dance school. We've talked about your relationships in the ballet world, but having left, do you feel that you have maintained any strong friendships, or built any new strong friendships, in the time since you've actually graduated from dance school?

[C] I think the friendships I had in dance school and especially the strong ones, the people I gravitated toward in ballet school who related to me, not specifically to my issues, but personality wise, those friendships are stronger than ever. There's a couple that stand out. Nothing could ever break a bond like that because you've been through so much together. Seeing each individual adapt through life now is more rewarding than anything, especially when you know how hard they've worked in the first place. And in new friendships, it's different because I've gravitated to people that are actually not like me at all. It just seems to be the way it's worked out, but I've got one friend in mind, and she questions when I question myself or doubt myself. She's like: "Why are you being negative? Look - you've done this, this and this. Why can't you take that away from it rather than focusing on that?" And I think that friend comes to mind because she's constantly challenging me to accept that I have done something great. But then again, that's me being a perfectionist. I'll never see the good in something when there's negatives there.

[I] Sure. I think that's a huge part of friendship as you say, someone who is able to rationalise for you what you're maybe struggling to rationalise for yourself. Moving on, as you said, you've had some really amazing, meaningful friendships - do you think you've had any meaningful romantic relationships in your time since leaving dance school and do any specifically come to mind?

[C] I think meaningful romantic relationships - I was in one when I was in ballet school. And I think, this is a prime example actually. I should have mentioned this earlier. However, in that relationship, I was constantly expecting things of myself that I thought my partner was expecting of me. The individual I was with was a dancer and achieved a contract at a very high-level, world-renowned company and I felt like nothing in comparison. And it was constantly this battle of me setting these high expectations that I must achieve this or that to seem worthy in their eyes. And I look back now on that relationship - it had its faults; it had its great points - but I look back on it on the whole very negatively. And I think I couldn't survive in there because I was constantly battling myself. I was constantly going through my own struggles with ballet school at that point. These struggles as well didn't feel valued. However, now, I'm in a recently new relationship and it's really breath-taking because there's nothing to compare to in a ballet sense. However, the individual accepts me for me and knows I am a bit of a taskmaster and I set high expectations. It's more meaningful because he just adapts to me, but also questions me and will rationalise me. And I think it took a while to find someone like that but once you have them, that's more meaningful to me than anything.

[I] I mean what a special, amazing relationship. Staying with that theme of the relationships in your life, do you think that if someone spoke to your closest friends, your closest family, your close meaningful partners, they would say that you were a perfectionist? They, as an outsider, would say: yes, this individual does fit the archetype for perfectionism.

[C] I believe so.

[I] Do you think, or more specifically, if we asked those individuals without you present to describe you in five words, as genuinely as they could - and I realise this is hard because you have to detach yourself - but without being overly critical or generous, trying to find the middle ground, can you pick

the five most accurate personality traits or descriptors for you. What do you think your closest friend and family would say?

[C] I think they would say I'm a hard worker - that would come up. I think they would say I'm caring. I think they would also say I stress too much. As an individual, I am very stressed I would say. This is so difficult!

[I] Soul-searching, I know!

[C] Yes. I think I'm quite intense - I think that relates more to my work ethic and everything like that and maybe it comes into the high expectations I have for myself. But once I am doing something, it consumes me wholly and I will intensify the situation and I will be very intense about it. So maybe that relates to high expectations. I'm trying to think what my mum says! Maybe she would say perfectionist but I'm not going to use that one again... I'm going to say... I don't know...let's think.

[I] We can always circle back round if you want more time to think on it.

[C] I think I'm an overthinker. Massively. That's what my final answer will be. Sorry, I'm just pondering into the distance!

[I] No, that's great to see you ponder. I think I was interested to hear the balance between maybe positive traits that you said and not necessarily negative, but maybe traits which you, within yourself, used as descriptors of these perfectionist tendencies that you said - and it was interesting to hear you pick up on those as key facets of your personality.

[C] No, you're right. You want to balance between the positive and the negative. And the key ones I did say - there's not that much positivity other than caring, and maybe hard-working, but two out of three are more negative.

[I] That's interesting. That's potentially what it made me think anyway. I guess moving on from that, my question is simply: Do you ever wish you could set lower standards for yourself or, if given the choice, would you continue to be a perfectionist or maybe even set higher standards of perfectionism for yourself and strive for the absolute perfect - whatever that may be? Or would you like to change the expectation you set.

[C] I would like to change, and that's simply because sometimes I can't keep up with the expectation that I put on myself. So much so that it gets into this massive negative spiral, and still does today, probably not as much as it did when I was dancing. However, now it's still there and it's still evidenced in my behaviour. However, I would say the only way to lower these standards, and if I could, if I could reverse anything, it would be not doing eight years at a ballet school. And I hate to say it, as it was a massive part of my life, and it impacted me positively as well as negatively, however, I think that's the only way I could go back and even change any of it because if I was, I don't like to use it but an ordinary individual or an ordinary eleven year old going to grammar school or going to secondary school, and achieving my GCSEs and working through and being part of team sports and doing my A Levels and going to university, they're the only expectations that would be put on me by my parents, by my peers, by my teachers. However, there were so many more expectations put on me than I even realised at the age of eleven. Like moving away from home - and the high

expectation imposed on you is that you have to deal with it. There's an expectation that you move away from home, and you just have to get on with it. Like, I think that's the only way I could say I could lower the expectation of myself now because, from a young age, there were these expectations put on me that were so demanding that I just don't know anything else. And that's where I'm at today. I don't know anything else than to put these high expectations on myself. That's all I've known.

[I] I can completely gather that from everything you're saying. And so that leads me into asking you: If you could change anything in the dance world, or within dance schools specifically, and you could alter a few key things whether they pertain specifically to encouraging perfectionism or just generally anything you think needs to change - what would they be?

[C] I think the way the dance world runs; it would be difficult to change anything because the main thing I would change is the constant comparison to other people. I know you have it day to day, but it doesn't feel quite as intense as it does in a smaller studio with eleven other people when you know your director is looking and you're constantly being judged against those eleven people for the foreseeable. It's so difficult because when you're trapped in that environment - not trapped - but you *are* trapped and there's no way that you can reverse psychology your way out of it because that's your life in that school, in that studio, going forward. In the real world, it's different because there's so many more opportunities, because you're not compiled in one space so you're not constantly comparing yourself. I think I'd try and change that. I'd try and remember that you are young individuals and there is so much being expected of you. However, you're going through a lot emotionally. You're going through a lot physically. I don't know if every ballet dancer will say this, but I think it is generally that the persona of a ballet dancer is to be perfectionist. I can say 'I want to change this; I want to change that' but I think it's fine-tuned into you. Because everything in ballet - you know if there's a finger out of line, if there's a toe out of line, if there's a hip, you know, the minute details all lead to perfectionism. And I think what I'm talking about is my idea of 'I shouldn't compare myself to other people', but I think it's always going to be fine-tuned into a ballet dancer that there's this element of a perfectionist and this element of very high standards. Imposed by your peers, but also imposed by you.

[C] Yeah, I think you're completely right. It's the nature of the game in that it's not necessarily a sport where you're always aiming to run faster or jump further, it's all about these kinds of subjective lines and you are always striving to look better. And I think that changes the focus away from maybe your physical ability very much onto the visual aspect of it indeed. And so, my final question of this section before we move onto a section a little bit more about your memory is quite simply: Do you think it's possible that you could lower your perfectionist standards with time? Do you have hopes that as your life goes on, you might find ways of tackling it, or do you think this is something that is with you long-term?

[C] I think it's something that's with me long-term. I think I'll always have these high standards of myself, whether they're attainable or not attainable. However, I could definitely change my mind set to how I achieve them in terms of saying, it doesn't matter if a long-term goal isn't achieved initially, because who can do that? You can't come straight out of [X] school and [land your dream job]. Because that's my goal eventually, it doesn't mean that I'm not going to achieve it and just because I'm making little steps at a time, it doesn't mean I'm a failure either. But I think I could definitely change my mind set in terms of how I deal with these high expectations and break them down into more obtainable chunks in the meantime.

[I] Absolutely. And then, we're shifting now onto a section about memory recall and trying to assess whether you think how you recall these memories has maybe altered over time as you've processed them again and again. It's whether every time we recall a memory, how we think about it actually

alters. So, I was going to ask: when thinking back on certain experiences we have spoken about, do you experience any specific emotions? If I list a few to try and prompt you - nostalgia? Or regret. Anger? Happiness? Sadness? Guilt? Excitement? Anything? Do any specific emotions come to mind?

[C] I think out of all the ones you've listed there; I can definitely relate to all of those in prior experiences for sure. I think, as well, there was dread - going into assessments and everything, I dreaded it completely and utterly. Auditions, I dreaded every single one of them. I think there was a lot of sadness, there was a lot of happiness. There is a lot of regret that I wasn't kinder to myself and that the things I achieved in ballet school were amazing, but in my mind they're still a failure because I didn't pursue it as a career. Despite the little wins, the great win even - which even though I did achieve that, and I chose to step away - that's still not a big win to me. So, I regret feeling now that I deem myself as a failure but in my mindset, I still can't quite figure out how I can change that around. I think nostalgia because I do miss it. There are parts of me that always will despite everything that I went through - emotionally, physically you do miss it. I'll watch dancing now on my phone, on a laptop or I go to the theatre, and I miss being able to do something exceptional with my body and I miss that talent that I had. However, I'm angry at myself and I feel anger towards what I did because I never sat down and went 'you know what, you've achieved all this' and patted myself on the back - I never did that once. And I'm annoyed at myself and I'm angry at myself for not doing that. I think guilt, I do feel guilty because I don't think I absorbed everything I could out of it because I was very negative for a lot of the time, and I just think I should have absorbed it more and made the most of it. But then, like you say, when you're angry at something and you're feeling these very passionate feelings day to day, it's very hard to back out of that psychology and mindset. So, looking back, yes, all those specific emotions I felt. It's a tough one.

[I] I can imagine, most definitely. When you think about these memories very vividly and in great detail - do you think your recollection is accurate or do you think it has in anyway been impacted over the years, whether that be to view the memories more negatively or more positively than when you were living through them? Or do you think actually you recall them exactly how you felt them in that moment?

[C] As time has gone on and I've had time to think, recollect and go over specific memories, the more negative my mindset is towards them. And I only say that because my approach to them is more realistic - it's taking it in. I don't know about other people, but I remember, I think, every single thing that went on in that ballet school because it was a massive part of my life. Okay, maybe not every single thing, but every big thing that mattered to me. And I think the more time I've had away from something like that, and that environment, the more negatively I view them with more of a realistic and eyes wide open approach now. When you're experiencing it, even if it's a short negative, it's a negative thing to go through. But I think to get through something like that, you cling onto the positives more than anything to get you through. Whereas they might not have been a positive there and then. I remember graduating. Walking away from that school, I said, 'I've had the best 8 years of my life.' And I say that still now because of the people I met and the friendships I made and the experiences I had. The experience as a whole. But now, for three years down the line, I don't think I'd say the same comments leaving the school now.

[I] And do you think that this is somewhat natural that, as you process your memories over time, they do change? Or do you think that is something distinct to this situation?

[C] I think, over time, of course your memories change. I don't know if this is just distinct to the situation in terms of, I now view them negatively and is that because of my perfectionist qualities

making me them view them negatively? I don't think many people would over assess them as I would. And I think this relates back to the high expectations as well as there being many memories that I have gone over and gone over and gone over in my mind. And I now see them with my eyes wide open, but I think it's more related to high expectations and being given time to overthink - not overthink - or overthink to me maybe.

[I] That's interesting to hear you speak about that feeling of going over memories in your mind. In quiet moments, do you find that you're thinking back on memories? Or do you think that you're looking forward to what's happening? I'm interested as to where you think your mind naturally wanders in those moments of solitude.

[C] In moments of solitude, I think I still remember negative memories or things that I remember very vividly that badly impacted me. I'll always drift back to those. However, some of those now carry forward. I think if there's a situation that's making me feel very stressed or uneasy, I will compare it to something I have experienced prior. And every experience prior usually related back to my time in dance school.

[I] That's really interesting. And my final couple questions - I mean this is a big question - but how would you rate your overall life satisfaction since dance school? I haven't put a rating scale here as such - you can do it again on a 0-100 or you could go from very satisfied, to somewhat satisfied all the way down to very dissatisfied - but I wondered how you felt?

[C] I'm going to say somewhat to very satisfied and put myself in the middle on the scale.

[I] That's perfect - somewhat to very. And finally, do you think that your life satisfaction would improve if your perfectionism rating scale? Or do you actually think it wouldn't have that much bearing on how happy you are in your life now?

[C] I think it would, and I simply say that because I know colleagues of mine and peers of mine now in this industry that I'm leaning towards and working with and the initial conversation is "what school did you go to etc.?" And I hate talking about it, but you get to the point where you have to say. And their reaction is "Oh my god, that's absolutely incredible" but, to me, I just shrug it off like it's nothing - and they'll be like "talk about memories" and I'll just say, "I don't really want to" and I'll put it off. And on the whole, I should be proud of what I achieved. Everything that went along with those 8-years of training - it was hard work, it was dedication, it was tears, it was blood, it was everything - it was injuries, but I should be so proud and yet, I'm not. And I think if my perfection rating for myself fell, I would be able to view that with less judgement than I have now. So, totally, I think my life satisfaction would improve in terms of my memories from before and also going forward, because now I feel like I'm playing catch up at I career I wasn't successful at initially and life satisfaction - I would be happier, yes totally. I am very happy, but I could be happier for sure.

[I] And then, my final question is, do you have anything you want to add at all? Obviously, I have forced you to delve into the depths of your brain, but do you think there is anything I haven't touched on regarding this topic of graduates from dance schools who come out with higher perfectionist tendencies than the general population that you think is a key point?

[C] No, from everything I've spoken about, I think you've covered everything and got the balance correct.

[I] Amazing. In that case, I wanted to say a huge thank you for speaking with me today. As has been specified, once this transcript is done and I have the research findings, of course I will share them with you and let you know what I find out. I mean, I'm more interested than anyone to see what I find out! And obviously, everything will be kept confidentially; I've sent you the data and privacy notices and you've read over those. Everything is anonymised and I'm really, really grateful that you've spoken with me today.

[C] No, it was my pleasure, thank you for having me.

Interview end.

Appendix III: Zoom Interview with Jess

Time/ Date: 6 pm 23 March 2022

[Interviewer]

Hi, thank you so much for joining me today. I really, really appreciate your time.

[Jess]

Yeah. You're welcome. It's a joy to be on the phone and to dive into some cool areas with you.

[I] Awesome! Okay, so I will run super quickly through the informed consent form we have and the data and privacy stuff, so that you basically know everything that's going on. You've already been briefed on what the project entails, but as well as that, within this, we're aiming to conduct interviews in order to understand how perfectionist tendencies can impact on dancers' lives in the long-term, whether that be actually positively or negatively. I will be recording personal data of participants who consent, but no identifiable data will be used in any research outputs. I'm obliged research in accordance with the University obligations and all my storage etc. will respect your privacy. No sensitive personal data will be processed or made available in research outputs. And during the lifetime of this project, I'll secure everything in a secure, encrypted OneDrive. And, of course, you can have access to anything you need. If you decide to withdraw anything, that is absolutely fine. The only person who may receive access to it other than me is my course convenor and nothing will be shared or transferred. So, that's all fine. And then, the informed consent. I basically just have to ask are you okay if I read all of these statements and you just answer 'yes' at the end. So: I confirm that the purpose of the study has been explained and that I have understood it. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and they have been successfully answered. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason and without any consequence. I understand that all data are anonymous, there will not be any connection between the personal information provided and the data. There are no known risks or hazards associated with participating in this study. You've read and understood all the information above, you agree to participate, and you are over 16 years of age. Is that all okay?

[J] Yes!

[I] Brilliant! And just one final thing and then we can launch into the actual questions which is literally that you consent to your data being transcribed and wish to be referred to anonymously in written forms of dissemination and you consent to audio/video files of participation being used for research purposes only, including the written articles where all identifying data will be removed

[J] Yes, I do.

[I] Fabulous. Okay, thank you so much. Well, on that note, we can actually launch into the far more interesting bit, which is the interview questions. So, my first question is very simply: Do you identify with the following definition of the term 'perfectionism'? So, perfectionism is defined as: "The tendency to demand of others or of oneself an extremely high or even flawless level of performance, in excess of what is required by the situation".

[J] Yes, I do.

[I] Sure. And that kind of sets the tone for the interview. And then, my second question, very simply is: Would you describe yourself as a perfectionist – yes, or no? I realise that is quite a limiting question, but if I was putting you into just a yes or no, what would you say?

[J] Yes.

[I] Yes, okay. Great well that makes for my next question which is: Prior to dance school, so as a

graduate of ballet school, prior to attending, can you remember ever setting very high standards for yourself or expecting more from yourself than the situation perhaps demanded?

[J] 100%.

[I] Yes, sure? Is there anything specific which comes to mind?

[J] Yeah! Well, I remember when I was specifically at [insert local ballet school], I think we were drilled quite a lot because we were all at a disadvantage in not being at a full-time ballet school. So, it was like you had to come every day, you had to come and do your workouts on the side. And oh my gosh, this is so embarrassing, but I actually remember that I used to - this is awful - but I used to sometimes like before or after classes, I would go to the corridor outside of the toilets and do an ab workout by myself.

[I] Wow, really?

[J] As like a - because I was so desperate to be better.

[I] Yes!

[J] That is so embarrassing!

[I] No embarrassment or judgement at all - literally anything goes here!

[J] Yeah and I remember that at the same time, things like that, doing the extra stuff helped. But when I look back at it, I'm like 'Oh my gosh?' Me as a child, I was messed up!

[I] No, I think that's really interesting that you trace it back to even before you went to a vocational ballet school. And then I guess I would say, do you think your dance school training - so this kind of pertains specifically to vocational ballet school, but actually feel free to relate it to prior to that - do you think your dance school training is responsible for generating your perfectionist tendencies? And, if yes, what specific aspects of the dance training environment do you think push students to set such high expectations for themselves?

[J] I personally actually am not sure that for me it came from that, because I think it might have come from my mum more than anything else. Then I'm like, she taught me a lot and actually maybe I wouldn't be where I am if I didn't have that. But I think when I actually went to vocational school, I almost rebelled against the like perfectionist mindset because we had so much time in the studio, like we would have two and a half hour classes that just to me was nonsense. So, I would be there, and I would do it, but I would try and get away with doing as little as possible, rather than overdoing it and killing myself because I was just like 'there's no way you can survive here'. But I do think that the way that schools subconsciously drill favouritism and have this competitive mindset sets you up to be in this weird perspective that actually being in a professional ballet company now, is not the same at all. Like, it's totally different and it's so much better because you're an individual and your individuality is encouraged. But when you're at school, it's like they strip that from you - your individuality - so that you all have the basis of technique and the basis of hard work and stuff, but then you do lose a bit of the emotion. And because you're human, you can't just work without emotions.

[I] Sure.

[J] So, for me now, as I'm going into the studio every day for trainings, I actually try and bring my emotions with me. So, whether I'm having a tired day, I won't force myself or I'll do things but take it easy. Or, if I'm having a day where I'm really energetic and really full of joy, I just like enjoy moving and move in a different way rather than having this strict form of 'okay, this is how the first position is', 'this is how the second position is', 'this is a fondu' - no, this is a fondu and I'm going to find my

way into it, rather than being like told. And I think that I was such a hard worker that it then pushed me to work harder, not necessarily aiming for perfection, but just demanding a lot of myself physically, because I wanted to succeed and be a high performer.

[I] No, sure. That makes perfect sense. I guess, then, my question would be: You described what, as an outsider, I would think are fairly healthy coping mechanisms to deal with quite a difficult environment. What do you think led to you maybe developing some of those coping mechanisms which other dancers may not have because research shows that dancers are more likely to be perfectionist but it sounds like you, in some ways, have tried to counter those tendencies?

[J] Honestly, I mean, I am a Christian, and I do think like I've learnt a lot of lessons through my relationship with God. Injury as well, He's really taught me that I'm a human first and that having the perspective of the people, you know normal people let's say - people who are studying, people who are teaching, friends in your group and social sphere - has really opened my eyes to be like 'actually, I am a human, I am only able to do so much' and then I need to rest, I need social time, I need this or that. And I think that it's been good being in a company and at first, it was really difficult because it was just like you go from the high intensity of school and have like nothing. But now, it's like okay, I'm working for myself, I am my own scorer.

[I] Sure.

[J] Which, in a way, the perfectionist side of me has actually helped because it's helped me keep in check like my technique. It's helped me be like if I've had a day where I've been a bit lazy, the perfectionist voice in me is like "Jess* don't let yourself go, like don't let yourself slip, you should work your arabesque, you should work your turns or something" - so that's helped. But then some days, I think comparison is quite hard. If comparison creeps in, then the perfectionism also creeps in and that's when I have to be like "okay, Jess, stop, why are you dancing? Is it for joy?" And if it's not, then that needs to change for me because it's all about why I'm doing it - you know?

[I] Yeah.

[J] Know your why before your what is something I love.

[I] Yeah - I love that, that's a really really good quote - I think I should bring that into my own life!

[J] Take it!

[I] Yeah! And building on what you said then, you did identify as a perfectionist at the beginning of this interview, and you have talked a little bit about the positives and the negatives. But do you think it impacted on your training experience at vocational ballet school at all or your relationship with dance, for example, if I specify a few areas, maybe appraisals, or any specific performances, do you ever think the fact you identified as a perfectionist impacted on how you performed?

[J] Not so much how I performed because I think for me, when I was actually having an appraisal or having a show, I just let go because I know that I've done the work so it's about trusting yourself. But I do think and this is an area I haven't thought about, that it did affect my relationships when I was at vocational school, because even when I was training a lot, and then you would come home and if you hadn't had a day where you felt content with yourself, I feel like I would almost self-sabotage my relationships to be like 'I don't deserve to go and have fun, I don't deserve this because I haven't performed well, so I'm going to stay in or I'm going to overexercise or be really firm with myself', which was just so detrimental. So, I think that's for me where it comes in is when I know that I've missed the mark, I then have this tendency to just rip my flesh out which makes me feel *inverted commas* better, but it doesn't.

[I] No, for sure. It's as if you're pre-empting my next questions which are how it's impacting on relationships and friendships, so we'll work our way through them but 100% yes, I think that element of self-punishment is really interesting. And then, my next interest is: At dance school, how did you find you responded to criticism, whether that be from teachers or from those in authority? Whether that be in relation to dance or more general things? Your personality or your individuality? How do you think you respond in relation to criticism?

[J] I remember at school, I hated it. I never wanted to get corrections and I had friends who would be so in the face of the teacher being like "correct me, correct me". And I'd be like why? Why are you like that? I'd just want to get away with it and just hear 'good'. I wanted that. But now, it's the opposite. If a teacher gives you a correction in training, because you know that they are there to help you, like the ballet masters want to help you and they like you, your friends with them. They're your age, that's what it should have been. But I think that was almost a feeling of fear at ballet school because it was so competitive and because it was like this bubble, then the criticism would become so big, and your perspective would be so small. But it's very different now.

[I] Yeah.

[J] I will say as well, I don't know if this is interesting to say, but I'm studying at the moment on the side doing an Access course to then maybe go to uni at the same time in the future. But what I've noticed a lot is that my perfectionism with studying.

[I] Really?

[J] Like I'm so strict with myself now that it's like, I can't fail. I was literally having this conversation with a friend the other day and I was like 'man; I think ballet dancers in general need to take up hobbies that they're really bad at'.

[I] Yes!

[J] Just for the sake of having fun and failing and failing well. Because everything we do, like I have a friend who's like 'I love painting, but every time I go, I'm so particular and so this...' and I was like "But why are you going painting? Isn't it for fun? Isn't it to enjoy?" But we don't know how to enjoy, we don't know how to receive that, you have to earn it and you have to get that performance stamp of like 'I did well'.

[I] No, 100%, I think you've summarised that perfectly. And that is definitely something which does come up within dancers because it's so engrained into you that your work and your enjoyment, your passion are so intertwined, it's so hard to separate it out and so something purely for passion, I think. That's again, very good advice to take up a hobby that you're not very good at just purely to enjoy it.

[J] Yeah! It can be like really random as well, like I don't know... ping pong or playing guitar, you know? Or like clay, I don't care, like pottery. Something that I took up actually in a season that was really hard when I felt like I was not good enough at work, I started doing Gaga, I don't know if you've heard of ga-ga?

[I] Is that the Vogue-y time dancing?

[J] Kind of. It's from Ohad Naharin, who's an Israeli choreographer and it's a style of contemporary dance where basically the mirrors are closed, no one is watching you, you stand in a circle, and you find the sensation of movement rather than the physical look. So, you work from the inside out rather than the outside in.

[I] Wow, incredible.

[J] And that was really, really eye-opening for me.

[I] I can imagine, yeah. The emphasis is on the fulfilment of the movement rather than the actual visuals.

[J] Yeah, exactly.

[I] I mean, I'm interested to know, you mentioned your perfectionism within academic work. How do you find you respond to - I don't know if you get criticism or do you submit assignments and get appraised on them - how would you respond to criticism in that sense? Would you find it more difficult, less difficult than criticism in a dance sense nowadays?

[J] Oh my gosh, honestly, I don't read the criticism - like sometimes I really should because it's how you learn. But I get my results from assessments, but if it's like a distinction - I'm like, 'wooh yes distinction,' and then I'm like - 'next thing'. Normally with it, they'll say the distinction then be like 'this is what you could have spoken about, this is the feedback, but I can't be bothered with it - so I don't read it. So, if anything, that tells you how little I care. But also, I do think there is still that fear of like, I don't want to hear about it because then I'm like, I didn't do well - I didn't do the best. Which is impossible! No one gets 100%, no one gets no critique - you know.

[I] It's not possible, but just seeing the distinction removes any imperfection at all?

[J] Yes! So, in my mind, I'm like - ahh, I'm perfect! But then I don't read the critique so I'm like 'I basically got 100%'

[I] Sure - I understand the thought process! Well, moving on from that then and moving away from the idea of criticism, you kind of mentioned this comparison and I wanted to ask how you think the standards you set for yourself compare to the standards your peers set for yourselves? So, whether that be in dance schools or actually since you've been at a company - do you feel that actually those around you have similarly high standards or do you think you're actually maybe the odd one out in that?

[J] Oh my gosh ...

[I] Sorry... tough questions

[J] No, it's great, I love it! I honestly think I set myself impossibly hard standards if I'm thinking about it honestly. I look at my friends and I almost subconsciously set myself at higher standards than them because I am like 'I can do better' and it's like honestly subconsciously do it without really realising and I think it's because I'm so competitive, even though they're my friends. I would never talk to them or even think about it in a competitive way because when I'm looking at them, I'm not looking at them like my friend who does this, I'm just like 'oh you're another colleague', but they're also my friends. So, it's almost like, there's a sea of colleagues if there's one thing - I may not be that talented, but I will work harder than everyone else. And then you kill yourself.

[I] And that is the downside! That's really interesting you to say you introduce an element of detachment when it comes to the studio environment - they're not so much your friends. And I can relate to that - they can be your best friend outside the studio but within the studio, there is an element of competition always. Yeah, no it's really interesting.

[J] Actually, the days where I have the best classes, are the days where I shut up my mind in that day and I actually go to the back and have a conversation with my friend as I'm dancing. Because then I

go to the studio the next day ready for class - and I'm not like 'ugh I have class, I have to get through this' - I'm just like 'I'm gonna talk to my friends, dance in the middle and yeah'

[I] For sure. And you have already kind of touched on this, so feel free to either reiterate what you said or expand if you'd like to - I was going to ask about how you think your identification with perfectionism has affected other areas of your life outside of dance. So, whether that be friendships or maybe romantic relationships or familial relationships - do you think it's impacted any of those things at all?

[J] I think, I do think it impacted my relationship romantically, yes, but I don't think I ever have the same expectations of other people that I have of myself. It's never like I feel 'what are you doing with your life' like etc. It's always like I've missed the mark, I will then be upset with myself, but I think that in my relationships with people who aren't like me - like who are more Type B personalities - I actually try, because I know that this is my weakness or my weakness is being too hard on myself, that I try and learn how to rest from them. And honestly, I'll give you an example from *today* that will maybe give you some insight. So, I was in a cafe with my boyfriend, and I took my computer to do some schoolwork and I had a break, and we were walking around, we were having a really nice time, it was sunny. We got to the cafe, and I was like, okay I've got about an hour to get stuff done - get sh*t done - whoops sorry...

[I] That's fine!

[J] And I was like, okay, I've got my laptop. And he started talking to me and we were having a great conversation but at the same time we're having this conversation, this little voice comes behind me in the back of my mind like "Jess, you have sh*t to get done". And so I was listening to him and he was being emotional and sharing this stuff and he was just so present and I was like 'yeah yeah, yeah' but also 'Jess you need to do this, you need to do that, how can we segue the conversation?' - so I get my laptop out eventually and he's like 'I'm so sorry, you need to do your work, you get on with it! And by this point, I have half an hour and I'm like, I have half an hour to get all this stuff done then I have to run somewhere else, why do I do this to myself? And then he's there and he's like "Jess do you want me to go?" And he looks at me and, in that moment, I literally look at myself - it's almost like I step out the picture and I'm like 'what the frick are you doing Jess?' I closed my laptop and I look at him and I'm like "I'm so so sorry. This is not my priority. This work is not my priority, you are my priority. None of this matters if you aren't in there." So, it was just like - it hit me and bless him, he was just like *feigns shocked* because I was like the beast! We were even looking at flights for summer and he was looking over my shoulder to look and I was like, "No! I'm looking, I'm exploring, I'm doing this by myself!" And he was like "What the heck has happened to you?" So, anyway, that's an example. But it's like my reflex and then I recognise it and have to be like - woah, actually what's the most important thing here.

[I] Yeah, which sounds very healthy. I can imagine it's taken a while to cultivate the self-awareness of when it's happening as you say.

[J] Yeah. And now I think about it, when I was in my first relationship, while I was at ballet school, there was one thing that I always remember, and it was like the biggest argument we had was that he would be like "Jess what are your priorities? You need to sort out your priorities?" And I was like shoot true! And obviously, he was being like - you need to prioritise me because I wasn't prioritising him, I was prioritising myself and my work.

[I] Interesting, very interesting. Very self-reflective I must say.

[J] Ah well, my old age!

[I] It's wisdom! I wanted to ask you then what your relationship actually is with success? Do you believe you succeed as much as, or maybe more than, or even less than your peers? If I asked you what your view of yourself is and your success level in relation to those around you? And you can be completely honest within this.

[J] Man. So, complete honest answer, I succeed less. But then my mindset about success is something that I've changed because I think success is how you define it. So, I don't think it should be something that is like found in - oh my gosh actually my mum said something the other day and I had to be like "hold up? Shut up!" Not actually like that, that's a bit rude but yeah... she was basically talking about someone I knew from like years ago who was doing very well in standards of the world. So, was dancing in an amazing company, doing a new piece and the way that she was presenting it to me was like "this person's done so well for themselves" and what I heard was "this person's succeeding, what are you doing with your life?" And I heard it and I was like, "excuse me, actually, is that person happy? Is that person content in their life? Does that person have satisfaction in their job because unless you know those things, please don't compare me to them!" Because we think that success is getting to dance the big roles or being a certain name or whatever, but it isn't! It's about love and the people in your life. So, if I'm being honest, from the standpoint, I do think when I look at my other colleagues, I don't match up to them - I'm not succeeding via the standards of the world as they are but I also have this other narrative of being like 'Jess, what is success? For you?'

[I] Sure. And that leads me to ask you, do you think others would view you as successful? Do you think your family or those who know you well would look at you and think objectively that you were successful?

[J] I would say, no...

[I] Really?

[J] I would say, my family, yes, because they know me and they know that I'm content and I'm actually living my dream. But I think when I think about like colleagues or people from my old ballet school, and how they would view me now, and what I'm doing matter of factly, there's always like a layer of shame that I think I carry - this is very deep - there's almost like a layer of shame that I'm not doing solos or I'm not getting to do this or that, I'm still corps de ballet and so on ... so yeah, I think no. From that. And also, sometimes my family like my mum, I think sometimes has made comments that make me think she doesn't think I'm living up to my potential or whatever. But in those situations when I think about it, who cares? Life's short.

[J] Life is very short, it's true. And that's very interesting to hear you say that. I mean, I'm trying not to comment too much on anything you say, but I would say I'm an outsider on your life and as an outsider, I can't help but feel I *would* describe you as objectively successful.

[J] LOL!

[J] It's interesting to hear you say that because, again, that kind of plays into this idea of very high standards that you set for yourself - because I'm not sure that every objective outsider would think that at all. Does that make you think differently at all?

[J] You know, maybe, the more hard on yourself you are, or the less you think you are successful, the more objectively successful you are. So, like we have Marienala Nunez and these amazing ballet dancers - when you really get to the mentality behind them, I bet you they don't have the same. It probably comes across as humility but it's maybe also this imposter syndrome playing in - so...

[I] It's true - self insecurity potentially leads to objective success. It's a really interesting link.

[J] How f**** messed up!

[I] Yes, tell me about it! Well then, my question after that and, I guess, you've kind of just touched on it, what do you think are the benefits of perfectionism then? As you said, there are potentially some really successful individuals who also have these very high standards, so do you think there are benefits and pros to it?

[J] I do. I think that, for me, it gets me doing the work. It motivates me to do better. It's like I have a trigger in me that then when I know I'm missing the mark can be like 'hmm, get yourself together, pull yourself together, be professional, do the work'. But I think that - yeah, that's definitely a benefit. I think as well it's helpful when you're self-reflecting and self-analysing as well because then it's clear for you to see where you went wrong and to be humble and be like 'okay, I could have done that better, I could have worked at this better', but you have to come at it from a healthy mindset because if you let the perfectionism almost beat you down in those moments then it's not going to benefit you at all. And I think honestly, people who are the most free in themselves and the most confident in who they are, are the most attractive to other people. So, they are the most successful. So, I think actually maybe the less perfectionist you are, the more free you are. Does that make sense?

[I] Yes. 100%. Makes perfect sense. So, my next question, I feel like we've really touched on already, but you can give me a brief answer. I just asked you the benefits of perfectionism, if I asked you to summarise the pitfalls of it, you can even just list them if you want, what would you say?

[J] 1) Self-sabotage. 2) Not being able to celebrate, you know, the small things and the big things. 3) Imposter syndrome. 4) Overworking/ workaholism. I don't really like have depression or anxiety or anything like that. Or like, I've never had spells of it, but I'm sure that perfectionism can lead to that. I've definitely seen my colleagues being affected by that. Let me think. 5) Lack of joy. I think that's kind of the majority.

[I] I think that's a really comprehensive summary. And then we're going to slightly move into this area of relationships a little bit more in this next section if that's okay with you.

[J] Yeah. Yeah.

[I] So, my question is: Do you feel that you have maintained strong friendships in your time since leaving dance school? This can be old lasting ones or even new ones.

[J] To be honest, no. I have like my best friends but because we live so far apart, it's hard. But I do think it's sad, but work is a priority when you do ballet and it has to be, it's like the first thing in your life. So, often friendships come second which is really sad.

[I] Yeah. That's probably quite a universal feeling, I can imagine a lot of dancers definitely feel that. And then, secondly, do you feel like you've had, and I know you've touched on this and spoken about a few different relationships you've had, but do you think you've had any meaningful romantic relationships in your time since leaving dance school as well?

[J] Oh yeah. Deffo.

[I] And that's kind of interesting that it's contrary to the friendships. Do you think that's because when it's one person you're prioritising, it's easier to invest fully?

[J] 100% - that's it - yeah!

[I] Sure, that's really interesting. And then, moving onto again that idea of you kind of stepping away from yourself. If someone spoke to your closest friends and family, do you think they would describe you as a perfectionist from the outside?

[J] As in like someone who knows me or like someone...

[I] Someone that knows you intimately

[J] Oh yes. I think people like my friends or my roommate or my boyfriend, it's like I do things and they're just like "oh that's so Jess", but I don't even realise I do it in a certain way. It's just like the way that I am. And then afterwards, I'm like "wait, was that not normal?" And they'll be like "No, that's not normal." But it's just like the way that I automatically think is in a certain...

[I] Sure, yeah. The idea that it's totally subconscious and it just happens naturally.

[J] Yeah. Yeah.

[I] And then, this one, again, I'm going to ask you to be as objective as you possibly can and I know that's really hard: If someone spoke to your close friends and family, what five words would they use to honestly describe you? And I know that's really tough, take time to think if you need it.

[J] Like, positive or?

[I] So, if they were summarising your whole character in five words, what do you think they would say?

[J] Okay. Okay. So, actually, I was having a conversation yesterday with my boyfriend and he gave me one. So, sharp. He was like "yeah, you're very sharp".

[I] As in, on the ball?

[J] Yeah. He was meaning it like, you're actually very intelligent. And I was like "thanks". But it's not intelligent in the way of like book smart, it's just like 'on it' sharp. Determined. I would say creative, I think like I'm just always, not even just with ballet, I'm very vibrant in creation. Honest. How many have I had? Four?

[I] Four. Sorry!

[J] Um... hmm... aware.

[I] Sure. As in self-aware or aware of others?

[J] I would say both. I think that's actually something I'm very good at. Like I'm very deep in being self-aware of what my motives are, but I'm also very good at noticing other peoples.

[I] Very perceptive. 100% I can see that, most definitely. And then moving back to the last few questions before we move onto our final topic: Do you ever wish you could set lower standards for

yourself or, if given the choice, would you continue to be a perfectionist or maybe even set higher standards for yourself and strive for even greater perfectionism?

[J] Oh my gosh, definitely not the last thing. Yeah, not that! That would be like just living in torture. I don't think so, because I don't want to change anything about myself. So, I think if I lowered my standards of perfectionism, it's almost like I wouldn't have that drive. But then that's kind of sad in itself that the drive comes from that, but it's like I think with this mentality of perfectionism, it is the ignition for the drive to then start churning. It's not the thing driving the motor. It's just the ignition. And then I feel like I then can decide like how do I respond to this desire to do better?

[I] 100%. That makes a lot of sense. If you could change anything in the dance world, or within dance schools, which you think might foster less perfectionist tendencies – I know you said that yours began before that - or maybe facilitate less perfectionist tendencies. I ask that because research shows that dancers are more perfectionists, what maybe might you change within the environment if you had the chance to maybe tackle it?

[J] How long do we have? I, one, think there needs to be human resources on stand at these schools. Two, I think that there needs to be more encouragement in getting to know the person and the child - who they are, their strengths and weaknesses and just who they are as a person. Like weaknesses in emotion as well, not just ballet weaknesses. I think individuality should be encouraged and the way that you dance should be encouraged and not stripped back. And I do think that schools should be aware, I mean favouritism is kind of unavoidable because of the way that it is with auditions and things, but the honesty that the ballet school mentality has I actually really value. You know, when you're headteacher would tell you something, the director of the school, I would be like 'okay, this is serious' and you grow a thick skin to take it. But I think they should encourage - this is it! - they should encourage success. They should encourage when even if you've done a small thing that's a big success for you, that is a little thing that you can be like 'actually, you need to go home and be really proud of yourself'. Not for the sake of you did an amazing appraisal, not for the sake of you got into this job but because I see that you conquered the emotional battle of being really tired today and I saw that you actually tackled that. Do you know what I mean? Because then you're teaching the person to be emotionally healthy whilst physically, because you can't disconnect emotional and physical.

[J] Yes, definitely. Teaching them as a whole. I think that's a really interesting and, you're right, probably missing aspect of dance school. I just wanted to touch again on this idea you mentioned about human resources. What exactly did you mean by that?

[J] Well, for example, this is something that just peeves me off because every other company in the world has human resources, apart from my company by the sounds of it. Right now, so I'm very opinionated in that. Human resources, for me, I know there's a lot more to it, but they are the spokespeople for the dancers to come to the people in authority. So, they are really important, especially at school when you're a kid and you're unaware that you actually have a voice and even speaking out is a big enough step in itself because you're like 'I could get thrown out or whatever, or what will they think about me?' That you need someone who is going to stand up for you, but you can be completely honest and share how you feel and how you may even see a flaw in the system for the way that you're learning. And I think that should be encouraged because no system is right or perfect.

[I] Thank you. That was a great elaboration, thank you so much. And then my last question before we move onto the final section is quite simply: Do you think it's possible that you could lower your perfectionist standards with time? I know you said you actually wouldn't choose to. Do you think you could if you tried?

[J] Yeah. Honestly, when I stop doing ballet. That's like the Promised Land. It's weird because it's almost like, for now, I know that it helps so it's like I do recognise that while I'm in this, I can't just let go. I can't. But I look forward to the day when I decided to stop with ballet and I think I'll probably have other tackles because I'm even struggling with it when studying now, other things to overcome

now in that, but I think it will be in a different way. So, coming out of ballet, I've almost like learnt the lesson, so when those things happen, I will be able to be like 'okay, you don't need to do that Jess, this is not your salvation', you know?

[I] It's not your whole person, yes. Thank you so much, well, kind of to finalise we have a few more questions and these ones actually pertain not so much to perfectionism but actually to your memory. Because I'm really interested in how you actually remember these events - whether actually over time, your memory of them potentially alters or when you look back on them and recollect them, is it the same as it was as you experienced them in the moment. So, when you're thinking back on the certain experience we've spoken about, do you feel any specific emotions. And I can give you some examples to set you off, but feel free to name any that come to mind. For example, nostalgia? Or regret. Anger? Happiness? Sadness? Guilt? Excitement? Does any of those resonate with you as you recall this stuff?

[J] I would say guilt. Which is so stupid, but if I'm honest, I think that there's a feeling of guilt that it's like 'you don't deserve to rest or...' You know when I look back and I go into those places from when I was at school and it was like hyper perfectionist, hyper and overworking, I think I definitely felt guilty without even realizing so I couldn't even enjoy life. Now, I would say when I get in these moments of, for instance today in a flurry, it's almost like it's so stupid that I'm like - I feel like what an idiot you know?

[I] Yeah.

[J] And, I don't know, is there positive emotions that go with that? I think, as well, a part of me is proud. A part of me is proud when I look back and I'm like, 'yeah I overworked' because I'm like 'I'm a hard worker', 'I'm as close to perfection as I can be'. But it's honest truth, which is part of the problem, because then it feeds - it feeds the ego.

[I] Yeah you reward yourself for your own perfectionism and then, obviously, it's going to feed a cycle.

[J] EXACTLY!

[I] We're unpicking all sorts here.

[J] It's so good! I love it!

[I] Good. My last question on memory and then we have two really quick questions is: Do you think your memory and recollection of these experiences is accurate or has in anyway been impacted over the years, whether that be to view the memories more negatively or more positively than you may have done when you were actually living through them?

[J] I actually think it hasn't changed. I feel like over time, I'm very good at compartmentalising, so I think with those memories, I was just like 'that one can go there, that one can go there'. So, when I think about the emotional side of perfectionism at school or in things, it's the same as how it felt back then. I wouldn't say that it has changed.

[I] Sure. That's interesting to hear you say you have quite an accurate recollection. And then finally, 1. How would you rate your overall life satisfaction since - sorry this is a big question - since leaving dance school?

[J] So much better if I'm honest!

[I] Really? Well, I was going to say you can rate that however you want, it can be again on a scale. Or it can be like from very satisfied to somewhat satisfied to very dissatisfied.

[J] So, 1 to 100 when I was at school - 60%. Now, 1 to 100, 95. Because I'm an individual. I have my own life. It's great.

[I] Sure, that's really interesting to hear - and you think that company life is a far happier situation than school?

[J] Oh yeah! But to be honest, it isn't for everyone. Because a lot of people choose to let ballet be their everything. And then, you know, if it's their everything it's going to let them down.

[I] And then, my very final question is: Do you think this life satisfaction would improve at all if your perfectionism rating fell? Evidently, your life satisfaction is already very high, but would it increase, or do you think it would make no difference?

[J] I guess, yeah it would increase! Because the standard is lower so then you meet it more often and then... I mean satisfaction is a whole different hole to go down but yeah... I think that the daily things you're grateful for would increase. And on the days when I'm healthy and I recognise that my perfectionist tendencies are bad and I turn them off, are the days that I enjoy the most.

[I] There we go. Well, is there anything at all you want to add? I've asked all the questions I had scripted. Do you think there is anything I've missed that you think is really imperative and you wanted to touch on?

[J] I mean, I'd be interested to know the link between perfectionism and drive and like, how driven someone is. And also, I think with overworking and people who can recognise that they're workaholics, that would be interesting as well with perfectionism. But I don't know, I think that's everything.

[I] Well, that's a really interesting element, it's definitely something when I do my analysis, I will look at how everyone rated their success markers against their perfectionism markers and then I'll see if there's potentially a relationship in that at all.

[J] This is so interesting!

[I] Ahh I'm so glad, on that note I'll stop recording as I feel like we've covered everything but thank you so much, I really appreciate all your time Jess – thank you so much for joining me!

[J] No, thank you for having me, it's been great!

End of interview.

Appendix IV: Zoom Interview with Ben

Time/ Date: 7 pm 17 April 2022

Interviewer [I]

Hi Ben, thank you so much for joining me today, I really appreciate your time. So, all we're going to do is really quickly run through just the privacy form and the consent form just to check that you are all okay with everything. So, I'll very quickly read through the privacy and data awareness. Quite simply, this dissertation is on perfectionism in vocational ballet school graduates, as you are. And I'm going to read through kind of a few things. I hereby declare that I'm aware that as a researcher, I'm obliged to conduct my research in accordance with the University's obligations to respect data collection and storage. I guarantee no sensitive personal data pertaining to any special category will be processed as part of my research or made available in research outputs. During the lifetime of this research project, I'll store all data in a OneDrive on the University of Nottingham encrypted cloud storage, and it's provided by Microsoft Office, and I can give access to the course convener if requested but otherwise, it's confidential. I guarantee that any personal data collected will not be shared, transferred, or in any way exported, with the exception of giving access to my course convener or dissertation supervisor. They're the only people who will see it. And then, I will quickly run you through the informed consent to check that's all good too? So, I'm just going to read these aloud. And what I'll do is, I'll speed through all of them and at the end, you can just literally say "Yes, I consent" if you're happy with them.

Ben [B]

Sure.

[I] Fabulous. So, I consent that the purpose of the study has been explained and that I've understood it I've had the opportunity to ask questions and they have been successfully answered. I understand my participation in this study is voluntary. I'm free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without consequence. I understand that my participation sorry, I understand that all data is anonymous. There will not be any connection between the personal information provided and the data. There are no known risks or hazards associated with participating, and you've read and understood the above information and you confirm you're over 16 years of age. Is that all okay?

[B] Yep, that's all correct.

[I] Amazing. Two more questions and we're done. I consent to my data being transcribed and wish to be referred to anonymously in written forms of dissemination. And I consent to any audio or video files of participation being used for research purposes only, including the written articles where all identifying data will be removed.

[B] Yep. That's all good.

[I] Incredible, okay. Now all the boring stuff is done, we can launch into the questions. So, what I'll do is I'll start with a really simple question. And it's quite simply: do you identify with the following definition of the term perfectionism, and it is: "The tendency to demand of others or of oneself an extremely high or even flawless level of performance in excess of what is required by the situation".

[B] Yeah, I'd say I definitely agree with that.

[I] Really? Cool. Okay. And then as a follow-up question, quite simply, I think there'll be an obvious answer to this: Would you describe yourself as a perfectionist, therefore, yes or no?

[B] Yeah. I wish I didn't, but I do.

[I] Sure. Okay, so now moving into the more open-ended questions, I wanted to know prior to dance school, can you remember ever setting very high standards for yourself or expecting more from yourself than the situation perhaps demanded?

[B] I think before dance school, because I started very early, I was at dance school when I was eleven, so all those kind of like perfectionist standards of when you're quite a young age, they've already been set in that environment, but before dance school, so around nine or ten, those ages, I think potentially standards were being set. I wasn't necessarily setting them, because obviously I was too young to make my own choices. But yeah, so I guess there were standards being set up by myself but not by myself, and not being forced upon me per se, but just because I was being taken to auditions, or I was deemed good enough to be able to audition for those kinds of vocational schools. Being in a local dance school, having to meet a certain standard when I was too young to be setting them for myself. They were definitely being set.

[I] Yeah, sure. And you mentioned you were very young when you went into dance training, so as a yes or no answer, do you think your dance school training is responsible for generating your perfectionist tendencies? Or do you think that maybe they were sort of inherent before that?

[B] I think it was quite a big part of that. I think it's hard to separate that, because that was the environment where all of my personality or different tendencies were being developed in that environment anyway, so essentially, if I was in application school, maybe I still would have been a perfectionist. But I think it's kind of just like nature/ nurture. They both kind of play a part if that answers your question.

[I] Definitely. And then you mentioned this nurture aspect. Do you think there's any specific aspects of the dance training environment that potentially push students to set higher expectations for themselves?

[B] Absolutely.

[I] Yeah. And if I asked you to kind of try and name a few or try and pin a few of those aspects, are there any key things that sort of stick out to you as such?

[B] In what regards, like?

[I] So, for example, could it be teachers setting expectations, or is there more pressure as there is some comparison with peers? Is there any one particular thing, or few things, that you think really fuel the perfectionism within the dance community?

[B] I think I would almost say from my experience, it was almost in kind of three different stages. So, when I first joined, so when I was joining in year seven, it was more standards being set for you by teachers. So, our first teacher I remember in year seven, we thought he was overly harsh in setting standards that were literally unattainable. That's just perfection in general. Though it was kind of like those standards were being set for us and then it got to a phase, I'd say in the middle of vocational school, where it's more you take on their standards for you and continue setting them for yourself, alongside obviously this competitiveness with your other classmates. And then also just general puberty and all these emotions as well in the high-intensity environment. And then I'd say the third phase is when you're graduating. So, then it's more again, standards being set by other people, so by companies or by graduate teachers. Instead of trying to attain standards that you're setting yourself, you're attaining standards that are being set up for you into your future, your future endeavor to have a career.

[I] Yeah, yeah, I think that's really insightful. And then, in that case, how do you think being a perfectionist actually impacted on your training and your relationship with dance, for example, maybe in appraisals or auditions or in any other areas?

[B] Well, I think it's a complicated one because I had external issues with my mental health outside of dance. Eventually, that caused me not being able to balance the two with my mental health and also having to cope with the strenuousness of dance training. But I'm trying to remember what your question was!

[I] I'll read it for you again, of course, it was: How do you think being a perfectionist impacted on your training and relationship with dance? So, for example, do you think being a perfectionist made certain situations within your training more difficult?

[B] Well, I mean, going back to that, so I think initially, I personally found I had quite a healthy relationship with my perfectionism and my training. There was a point there without trying to sound arrogant or cocky, I was doing pretty well. My ability was doing well. But then when my mental health took a hit, then my training also took a hit, and then that all affected how I was dancing and performing. And then afterward, even though I was able to carry on and finish my training and have work, I never quite got to the point that I was before I had to take a break for my mental health. So, while I was actually working and performing, I had quite a good relationship with my own perfectionism and how I approached my work, but there was always that kind of, in hindsight, knowing that I know I have danced better, and I could dance better. So, there was always that degree of, 'I know that I was up here,' and always constantly being just underneath that, not quite getting to that point you knew you were at one point, that was quite difficult. But I think that's not really something that you learn to deal with. It's just you make peace with it in a way because things happen for a reason. You know?

[I] Definitely. That's really interesting. The idea of constantly striving towards a past expectation, as well as always setting yourself future goals. And yeah, as you said, it's really difficult.

[B] I think perfectionism is just something that's not attainable anyway, because being perfect is different for everyone. We can look at the best dancer in our industry, and we think that's perfection, but for them, they're going to be so far off the mark. The idea of it being something personal for each and every person but it's something that can never be achieved either. And that can be either a great motivator, or it can be people's undoing. It's like, as both of us know, in dance, we were friends with people, and we've also been training with people who've either strived for that picture or it has gone to their detriment.

[I] For sure, definitely. And then, in that case, at dance school, how did you find that you responded to criticism, whether that be from teachers or those in authority or even parents potentially.

[B] I think it depends on what kind of criticism to be fair. I think, for me personally, in dance training, I never really had a problem with getting corrections. I think it's more later on in my training. So, we'll know that actually in my graduate year, at my college at the time, there was a couple of the people in the faculty who were giving me corrections, but it wasn't constructive. It was personal and that I had an issue with. If it was constructive criticism, or criticism about my dancing or my training, and I could see that they're trying to help me improve then I have no problem with it. But because ballet especially is a high-intensity industry, it's very hard to not get personal with yourself or other people. So, in terms of purely constructive criticism, I had no problem with that because it was either them trying to improve my training or me trying to improve myself. But it was then when it was just barbed or loaded, that's when I had a problem with it.

[I] Definitely and that's really interesting you mention that. Was it very evident to you when it was slipping into something more personal and something constructive? I guess that could definitely impact your view on those individuals and their professionalism. So, yeah, how did that kind of change may be your perspective on them or your relationship with them when they started changing the tone of that criticism?

[B] Well, I mean, I think especially within the decade that I was in dance training, there were a lot of occasions where it was either for me or other people I was around, were getting really personal criticism. And I think when, for me, when I was getting that kind of criticism, which was personal and not constructive. I was a bit older, and I had a lot more life experience. I was able to deal with that even though I know the behaviour was probably out of order. Because I was more mature and more developed, I could cope with that. But growing up from being 11 to 21 in dance training, you see at different phases where people were getting criticism that was personal. And when you haven't got that resilience, your confidence gets knocked and I'm sure we've both seen that happen a fair few times.

[I] Definitely. And for the purpose of the transcripts, when you say personal do you mean criticism about things you can't change? Or for example, criticism about, like, your attitude to dance? Or what kind of things do you mean by that?

[B] I think it's more of a multitude of things. So, it could be like physical attributes that you can't change physically, like the dancer's weight at the time, or just general physically not being able to change your body - about tone, about conditioning, just how your body is built. And then there are also corrections that could be constructive, but they'll be delivered in a way that makes it personal. So, it could be a dance correction, say if your legs not straightened, you can be given that correction and it can be given constructively. But there were times, purely hypothetically, where someone would give a direction like that, and it'd be delivered in a way to make the person who's getting the correction feel awful.

[I] Yeah, 100% I think you've touched on something really interesting. I think we both crossed over with lots of people who experienced, and as well having personally experienced, that kind of unconstructive criticism. And then since leaving dance school, have you seen any change in how you respond to criticism, or do you think you have a similar relationship with it in that way? Whether that criticism comes from authority figures or friends, family, colleagues, do you think that you've carried that same attitude with you or has it altered at all?

[B] I mean, I do find what I do now, in work that I have done which isn't in the arts or the performing industry, say I've had a manager or a boss who's just not a very nice person or is like a power-hungry megalomania trying to approach something in a certain way or come a way about it, then I don't take that kind of stuff personally. I know when to just roll with it and when to stand my ground. So I feel like I've got quite a good balance of when something's "okay, I'll let that pass" or when something's just to me, unacceptable and I know not to stand for that. And there's a whole lot of other things where I feel like my training has passed over into just general work. Yes, there is that perfectionism, even if I'm just stacking a shelf or serving a customer, I want to try and do it the best that I can. And yeah.

[I] Yeah, yeah, definitely. And then I wanted to ask, how do you think the standards you set for yourself compare to the standards your peers set for themselves? Do you think it's similar? Do you find any difference? And that could be peers within dance school or peers outside of dance, or it could be both.

[B] I think it's a difficult one because obviously, it's always really personal for people when they set a target for themselves. I mean, in regard to say in dance school, obviously we all had the same kind of companies that we wanted to get to, or we wanted to be the best in the year group. Or we wanted the teacher to put us in the front group at the centre. So, I know that we had the same kind of goals then and it was kind of like a weird hybrid because it created an environment where we will work really hard, but in another sense also could be considered quite toxic. But then that's the kind of thing you only really look back in hindsight, because obviously it's 20/20 looking back and stuff. Looking back on something, it's not necessarily the cutest. But at the time, you'd just think either 'this is horrible', or 'this is great'. I think, now more so, if I'm, even if I'm just doing just some random job, I find that I work harder than sometimes maybe other people would. I mean, there's that training and the discipline that's kind of hammered into you. So, even if I'm doing something that I know I'm not going to be doing long term, I have no interest in working in that particular job for a long time, it might just be for

now until I do something else, I still want to do the best that I can. So, I want to be proud of the work that I do. I think that's something I can attribute to that idea of perfectionism and discipline. I hope I'm not waffling too much!

[I] No, not at all. Perfect. Thank you so much. I guess then asking you specifically about your current job, where you said you're doing some serving work at the minute, do you see any difference between the standards you set for yourself within that role and the standard some of your colleagues set for themselves? Or is it harder to tell in that sort of situation than in a dance environment?

[B] Oh, absolutely. I mean, the place that I work, there's a lot of people who are dancers or former dancers, and you can tell the difference between people who have that training and people who haven't. And obviously, you do get those people who just are hard workers. And I mean, the majority of the people who I work with are uni students who are of that age. So, you can definitely tell the difference, but we do have a lot of particularly vocational ballet school students who work for the company, and you can tell the difference between who are and who aren't by the way they work. And if you're working with one of the ballet school guys, then you know that it's going to be an easier shift than with someone who's just doing it as a part-time job from uni.

[I] Yeah, definitely. Thank you so much. And then my next question is: do you think that your perfectionism has helped or hindered you in any other areas of your life? So effectively, do you think your perfectionism has carried outside of dance school? I'll give you some examples I've got written down for example, within work, within friendships, within like familial relationships or romantic relationships, and you can give some examples of whatever you think is relevant.

[B] I don't think so per se, because I think it'd be more so being at dance school mainly affected friendships or relationships, but I can't say that's primarily because of perfectionism. Like, and I know even at dance school, I didn't let my strive for perfection, or everyone's strive for perfection, affect my social life. So, I wouldn't really say that it has. Other things, like what I mentioned earlier from issues that I had with my mental health, that affected everything. And perfectionism was one of the things that affected that, but it's not the sole cause if that makes sense. So, it didn't affect my personal life, but it was a factor of something that did.

[I] Definitely. Yeah, I think the reason I asked that is because I'm interested in how perfectionism can affect different domains. So, for example, you could be a massive perfectionist in one domain, say maybe ballet, and then not be a perfectionist in other domains at all. And that could be, for example, in your friendships, you don't put so much pressure on yourself. And it's interesting to see whether that's something that's constant across every area of your life or actually it's a lot more focused within ballet- that's basically what I was asking.

[B] That's interesting, actually, yeah, no, but I don't think so personally so much. I mean, it's interesting, because I mean, obviously, it all goes back to dance school, but definitely, I think we both know people whose whole life revolved around ballet. And I met people earlier on in my training and later on in my training, where you can see that for them, ballet - it's a cliché - but for them, ballet is their life. That's the only thing they'll do from 6 am to 10 pm. Everything revolves around dance; you do see that a lot. For me, personally not so much, thankfully.

[I] Neither! Yeah, that's really helpful. Thank you so much. And then I wanted to ask you what your relationship is with success: this grand idea of success. So, do you believe that you succeed as much as, more than, or less than your peers? I know, that's a really hard question, but I'm kind of asking you to step back and objectively look at it. And just sort of give your opinion on how successful you perceive yourself to be.

[B] That's an interesting one. I'd say, blanket answer would be yes, I consider myself successful. But I think there's also different facets when you look at that because I think, again, is not really an excuse but my mental health affected a lot of my training. So, sometimes, I mean, for a long time, I was quite

bitter because, it might be arrogance or cockiness, but I feel like my career could have gone a lot better than it did. Or I feel like I could have been a much better dancer than I turned out to be. And then you compare yourself to other people, people that I trained who have gone all over the world and have done amazing shows with amazing companies. So, it's kind of like a balance because you have that expectation and when you see other people living the dream, working with the company or companies that you would sell your soul to be working in, it can be tough. But at the same time, like, for me personally, there was a point where I didn't think I could have a career at all, so to be able to do the amount of work that I've done and be able to kind of stop dancing and start dancing again and be able to work with still amazing companies, I'm proud of what I've done. It's not what I expected it to be, but that doesn't make me any less proud.

[I] For sure, thank you. And that leads us into the next question, which is: do you think others would view you as successful? Would your family, friends, loved ones, or other outsiders view you as objectively successful?

[B] Yeah. I mean, I do have friends who have seen the stuff that I've done and been like: "you've done really well". And I think that's the kind of critical side of me and that's the perfectionist in all of us, where I know that I have been successful, but I'm also quite critical of myself. So sometimes I maybe don't allow myself to be like, "Yeah, I've done pretty bloody well." I know for a fact that my own parents are extremely proud of me. And I see why, and I am also proud of myself. With some of my friends, like people who in the pandemic lost jobs or people who graduated and are still trying to find a job, I know that I've been in a very lucky position to have been able to work and work quite consistently for a period of time. But then it's that kind of thing, when you're in your position, all you know is where you've been. So sometimes putting that kind of perspective or context makes you realise how other people might see how you've done.

[I] Yeah, definitely, like stepping outside of yourself. It's really interesting. And then, I want to ask you on the flip side, what do you think are the benefits of perfectionism? And have you felt any of these personally, if you do think there are any benefits? And then I know we've touched on these quite a lot, but then summarising what you think the pitfalls of perfectionism are and have you felt any of these personally? So, feel free to do a little list if that's helpful.

[B] Sure. I mean, I think the benefits of perfectionism would be the kind of stuff that it gives you - so it keeps you motivated and it will give you drive to achieve a goal. And even if things aren't necessarily great, you carry on going, you know. I think there's not so much point by point, so I hope it's not too confusing. For me, personally, I guess there's been many points where my perfectionism has helped me do better than I thought I could do. And it's even like, I don't want to turn around and put on yourself, but I feel like a good example of perfectionism would be how you've been able to do your academic training or learning/ education, and the length of time that it has taken you and the dedication that you've put towards it. For me, that would be a positive example of perfectionism. So that's one thing I think of and again, because that's something that I personally could never do, I've tried, and I couldn't do it. So that also kind of makes me be like "oh, I want to try and like work hard and do that also". So, downside of perfectionism is like you're too critical of things. What I was saying before, when you're a perfectionist, you can be extremely critical of yourself. And sometimes that's a motivator, but it is almost like a motivator with a cost. So, you keep going, but you will eventually burn out you know?

[I] Yeah, for sure.

[B] Yeah, I can't really think of anymore off the top of my head.

[I] No, that's great.

[B] Yeah. And I find that for me, because of my perfectionism there have been points - for example, when I started a course at university, it wasn't what I wanted to do - I'm proud I did it, it was a pathway I wanted to go down - but when I decided to withdraw and leave what I was doing, I found that very difficult. So, I took it quite hard, even though it was the right choice for me. It was kind of like, 'oh you're a failure'. So, it gives almost like the perfectionism gives you the courage to change your pathway, but it also makes you think, 'wow you're a complete embarrassment'.

[I]: Yeah, this idea of it being all-or-nothing, I think that's really interesting. And you mentioned burnout, I mean, I sort of said this in the informed consent at the beginning, obviously, any research I discover I will share with everyone who took part, but I'm definitely looking at burnout because there's a real link between that and perfectionism. So, I think that was very interesting. You said eventually, it does lead you just to kind of be like, 'I can't do anymore because the standards are so high'. So, that's a really interesting mention from you. Now I'm going to move into a section where there are a couple personal questions. So, as I said before, you absolutely don't have to answer anything you don't want to. Feel free to be like 'I'd rather not answer that' or 'I don't know', but if you do have stuff to say, that's amazing and very welcome. So, the first question is, do you feel you've maintained strong friendships in your time since leaving dance school? These can be old friendships or new friendships?

[B] Yeah, I feel like I have, yeah.

[I] That's pretty much a yes or no question. Really. That's what it is. Moving on from that, do you feel that you've had any meaningful romantic relationships in your time since leaving dance school as well?

[B] Yeah.

[I] Yeah. And then the next question, if someone spoke to your closest friends and family, do you think they would describe you as a perfectionist?

[B] Yeah, I feel like they probably would say so, yes. Like I say, I've got my particular close set of friends that will sometimes talk about how I'm feeling but I do think as well that I can be quite susceptible to internalising things and not necessarily speaking to people about my darkest fears. You know? If I told them, they'd probably be like, "Yeah, he is". That probably doesn't make loads of difference, but I felt like I should say it.

[I] No, definitely. So, you're saying that, as perfectionists, we can be very susceptible to kind of wanting to give off that very put-together facade or not share things with even those closest to you?

[B] Definitely. Yeah.

[I] Sure. Now, this one is quite interesting. If someone spoke to your close friends and family, what five words would they use to honestly describe you? So, please be as genuine as you possibly can. Don't be too harsh on yourself. Don't be overly generous. So, the five best descriptors basically.

[B] So, I'm just trying to think of five words honestly! I'd say, hopefully, honest, hardworking...

[I] I know. It's just thinking of adjectives more than anything isn't it!

[B] Caring, I'd like to think I'm caring. Is that three?

[I] Yeah.

[B] That's a difficult one, actually.

[I] It is difficult. We can circle back round.

[B] Yeah, that might be helpful. Or maybe that's telling in itself that I can't think of anything.

[I] Yeah. Well, we can check back in at the end, but for now, that's really good. And then do you ever wish you could set lower standards for yourself? Or if given the choice, would you continue to be a perfectionist? Or maybe even set higher standards for yourself and strive for even greater perfectionism?

[B] Well, no, I'd never want to set lower standards for myself. I think if anything, I'd want to not be as hard on myself as sometimes I am or allow myself more time to achieve certain things. And I think that again goes to ballet school that you have a particular set date and time to achieve certain things, and if you haven't got a job by graduation or haven't done this or that by a certain point in time, you deem yourself a failure. I think I do find myself, since graduation if I'm doing something, I find that difficult I think. I'm kind of just coasting or being a failure. And I noticed that has made me do things, say going to uni, that was more of a reaction for having lost my job due to COVID rather than a properly thought through and planned out career choice. So, I think, if anything, I don't want to deviate too much, but I wouldn't want to set low standards for myself. But I would want, and that's something that I'm working on still within myself, on not letting myself be as critical as I am if that makes sense.

[I] That makes perfect sense. And then, quite simply: if you could change anything in the dance world or within dance schools, which you think would foster less perfectionist tendencies, what would it be?

[B] I think, well I can only really speak for vocational training, as my kind of experience of working has really been positive. But I think within training, there has been from what I've seen work to change it, but I think more emphasis on mental health. Yeah, I think for me, that would be the key thing. Schools being able to be a lot more open and be a lot more critical maybe of their own practices. Sometimes I think that's not necessarily something that I'd be able to call out on the spot. I think being able to have procedures and systems in place to be able to look after students who are struggling because I don't think I necessarily had any issues with ballet school. A lot of my issues happened at or partly because of ballet school. So, it's not necessarily changing the whole system but making sure there are procedures in place to stop people either from harming themselves, or harming others. Because I think that happens a lot in ballet school. Because physically, it's a demanding environment but it's also, in turn, very mentally and emotionally demanding. And I can't really speak for what's happening now, but when I was in school, like I know two or three people had taken their life in dance school or having grown up in dance school. And I'm sure there's a lot of people, and we know people who have suffered a lot in dance school, I've also suffered quite a bit from dance school and in dance school. I think that's the thing that needs to be changed because you don't have to burn the establishment to the ground, but there definitely does need to be changes because it does affect people for the rest of their lives. I hope I haven't deviated too much.

[I] No, not at all. This is what I said, like literally anything goes, so feel free to word splurge because it's so helpful. Everything you say links in so interestingly to what I'm doing. And, as you said, it was incredibly sad what happened when that young person took their life. And it does beg the question: does there need to be more formal support in place? Probably. Yes.

[B] Yes.

[I] Okay, so, I've got one last question on this section and then we move on to a final section which is slightly different. So, you said you actually didn't want to lower your perfectionist standards, which is really interesting, because my question was: do you think it's possible to lower your perfectionism or sort of rationalise your perfectionist high expectations with time? But is that something that you actually would rather not do?

[B] I think that's something that I'd not rather do and I also don't think it's actually possible to because you can definitely stop yourself from trying to achieve standards. But you're never automatically not a perfectionist. It's not something you can change about your personality. So, if you're not trying to achieve those goals, you're both maybe not achieving and still have that judgement. Because I think that's also about a state of mind because say, if you are having problems with your mental health, it's kind of an example of you not necessarily achieving those goals, and yet the criticism is still there. So, for an example, when I was quite poorly, I wasn't going to classes, I was drinking a lot. I was still in that environment but not actually working hard. So, the criticism was still there. Physically, I wasn't even able to work. for it. Yeah, I mean, I'm blabbering quite a bit. But yeah, it's not something I'd want to change about myself, being a perfectionist and having the motivation to work hard. For me, it's trying not be as critical of myself. If I'm having a lazy day and I'm not doing something, I'm not working or I'm not working out or not training, it's not then thinking 'you haven't done anything today, you just sat on your bum and eaten food, so you're a fat failure!' So, it's not having those kind of thoughts.

[I] Definitely, definitely. That's really, really helpful. Thank you so much. And that concludes that section on perfectionism, specifically. And this final section is basically looking at how you remember experiences. So, as you said, you've been thinking back on this one very difficult traumatic time. And, you know, I guess when you think back on experiences in general, you know, whether that be dance school or just your whole career as it is, do you have any certain emotions, which crop up and I can kind of give you some examples. For example, nostalgia, regret, anger, happiness, sadness, guilt, like you're entertained, because there might be something funny, or is there anything else that's a really strong emotion that it brings up?

[B] I hope it's not a cop-out, but I'd say all of the above. I will say that because for nearly a decade, the vocational dance scene, dance training, that was my life. That was where I grew up. That's where I started puberty and became an adult, you know. So, everything that I had was in an environment, so it would be looking back on all that kind of stuff. I would probably feel every emotion under the sun. And yeah, that's the easiest way I can answer it because there are literally all of those feelings because for different times, obviously, I was there for a long time. So, a lot of different scenarios where I would have felt every single plethora of emotion that you can feel.

[I] Yeah, definitely. And then when you think back again on these experiences, do you think your recollection is accurate? Or do you think it's been in any way impacted over the years, whether that be to view memories more negatively or more positively than you may have done when you were actually living through them? And if so, do you think it's quite natural that memories do kind of change as you process them?

[B] I think it does because let's say if you have any baby videos of when you were younger, so when you're thinking about memories, it's not like looking back on a baby video because looking at a video of an event is very clinical. You watch it for what it is. But when you're looking back on memories, there's also all those emotions, how you perceive the same social cues you may have or may have understood. Then obviously because we're vain beings anyway, so there's always bias against yourself or for yourself. So, I think, it's interesting because memories aren't necessarily of the event in itself, but also your emotion and how you're feeling. Were you having a good or a bad day? Did that thing cheer you and make you feel good or was someone horrible and make you feel sad? They do change. I guess it's also - say if you were going through a really tough time - sometimes it takes a while for you to process a certain event. Or you may try and change how you felt about certain things to be able to cope with what you were going through at the time. I could waffle on for ages, but I think I lost where I was going!

[I] No that's great! And I've literally got two more questions for you. And it's quite simply: how would you rate your overall life satisfaction since leaving dance school, and you can do this on a kind of like very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied all the way down to like, very dissatisfied scale if you like. I know that's quite a broad one.

[B] I think it's very cliché, perfectionist term I'd have to say somewhat satisfied. Because I definitely know I'm very chuffed with myself from what I've been able to achieve. Because, yeah, there was a period where I didn't think I was going to be able to do half the stuff. I guess there's also more I want to do. I don't necessarily know what I want to do. But I know that I want to do something because yeah, I guess that's the kind of thing, like we're never satisfied though. There's always something else that we want even though I don't necessarily know what it is I want to do at the moment. There's that motivation to keep going. And I guess that also comes from a point of not being entirely satisfied. You're always looking for that next thing. That next life choice you make or career choice that you decide to go down, you know, so I guess in perfectionism, you can never truly be satisfied because you're trying to attain something which isn't attainable.

[I] Yeah. 100%. And then in a very clinical way if I said to rate that life satisfaction from 0 to 100, where would you place yourself right now?

[B] A solid 80 I would say.

[I] And then very final question. Do you think your life satisfaction would improve at all if your perfectionism rating were to fall?

[B] I feel like it would be honest. It's just degrees of what equals satisfaction because you see people who will work the same office job for 50 years and be completely satisfied. I've worked in a supermarket, and I was working with people who've worked there for 20 years and absolutely love it. It's that kind of thing like, are they less satisfied than me just because they've found a career they're happy at? Are they less of a perfectionist? You know if that makes sense? So, I was working career that I don't want to do, and I was kind of doing it to give me money and to keep me busy, all that kind of thing. But they had such pride in what they were doing. So just because they're doing something that I'm not wanting to do - I hope that makes sense? I feel like, yeah if I wasn't as much of a perfectionist, I'd be more satisfied with myself. But just because their idea of perfection is not necessarily mine, does that make them less than perfection? Yes, maybe it does. Because it's a very personal thing, and it's different for everyone. So maybe everyone's on the same level of perfectionism, but their goals are different.

[I] Yeah. I like that.

[B] Maybe that's a bit too philosophical for my own good!

[I] Not at all - very profound. Well, thank you so much. That's all the questions I have. I mean, my final final question is: do you is there anything you want to add? Like, is there anything I've missed or that you were expecting me to ask that I haven't at all?

[B] Not at all! I quite enjoy, like being able to speak about all that kind of stuff, talking about ballet school. I could waffle on but there's nothing really else I want to add. I could end up talking for another half hour.

[I] Wonderful, okay. Well, in that case, I will stop the recording. Thank you so much for your time. It's been lovely and I will make sure that I feedback any findings to you, of course, so I'll stop the recording now.

[B] Absolutely, thank you so much for having me!

[I] No, thank you - it was my pleasure!

Interview end.

Appendix V: Zoom Interview with Kimi

Time/ Date: 7:30 pm on 20 April 2022

[Interviewer]

Hi, thank you so much for joining me for this interview. I really appreciate your time.

[Kimi]

My pleasure.

[I] So basically, I'm going to run through the Informed Consent Form, and the Data and Privacy Awareness form as well just so you have the chance to consent to everything. Does that sound okay?

[K] Sounds good. Yeah.

[I] Great. So I'm going to read through the data one first and all you have to do is just be like, "I understand" at the end of it. So, I hereby declare that I'm aware that as a researcher, I'm obliged to conduct my research in accordance with the University's obligations with respect to data collection, storage and respect the privacy of all participants. The policy is available at this link which I've sent to you. I guarantee that no sensitive personal data pertaining to any special category will be processed as part of my research or made available in research outputs. And during the lifetime of this research project, I will store all research data collected in a OneDrive on the University of Nottingham's encrypted cloud storage, which is provided by Microsoft Office, and I will give access to the course can be that if requested. I guarantee that any personal data collected will not be shared or transferred, with the exception of giving access to the course convener or my dissertation supervisor, but not anyone otherwise. Does that sound okay?

[K] Sounds good. I understand. Yes.

[I] Great. And then Informed Consent very quickly. What I'm going to do is I'm going to read out a list of statements and if you're just happy to say at the end, "yes, I consent to all", that would be great. So, it says: I confirm that the purpose of the study has been explained and that I've understood it. I've had the opportunity to ask questions they've been successfully answered. I understand my participation in the study is voluntary, I'm free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without consequence. I understand the data is anonymous, there will not be any connection between the personal information provided and the data I understand there are no known risks or hazards associated with participating in the study. I confirm I've read and understood the above information. I agree to participate, and I'm over 16 years of age.

[K] Yes, I give consent to all.

[I] Amazing. And there's just two more things and they are: I consent to my data. being transcribed and wish to be referred to anonymously in written forms of dissemination. So basically, no one will know it's you, I won't include any personal data within the final piece. And I consent to my audio and video files participation being used for research purposes only, including the written articles where all identifying data will be removed.

[K] Sounds good.

[I] Amazing. In that case, that's the boring stuff done, we can move on to the actual questions. So, as I said before, you're free to answer as much or as little as you want. And we can stop at any time. So, my first question is, quite simply: do you identify with the following definition of the term perfectionism. And the definition is: "The tendency to demand of others or of oneself and extremely high or even flawless level of performance in excess of what is required by the situation."

[K] Is this generally speaking or in dance?

[I] This can be in dance, but I think, at this point, it's probably more of a general question. Unless you feel like there's a real difference between your dance and your life.

[K] I would say most definitely. Just because with the nature of dance as well, growing up, being in dance, it's just something that's drilled into you. It's normal. And I think I am just a person who was a very high achiever, who wants to do the best in everything. It's how I've been brought up. So, yeah, definitely.

[I] Sure. And I mean, I feel like this answer I could probably answer myself, but then would you describe yourself as a perfectionist, therefore, yes or no?

[K] Yes.

[I] Sure. So moving on to the more open-ended questions, I wanted to know whether, prior to dance school, you remember ever setting very high standards for yourself or expecting more from yourself from the situation perhaps demanded?

[K] Definitely. Even in school I always wanted the top marks or to get full marks, it was just my expectation of myself. Maybe from my parents as well, they expected that, although they didn't say it as such, you always want to do your best for them, and you know they expect the best of you. So, from my dad, definitely, I was always trying to be my best. My mum was more chill but yeah, in school definitely. All the time for as long as I can remember, I just always wanted to be the best at everything and to get it all.

[I] And then, in that case, do you think your dance school training was responsible for these perfectionist tendencies or not? You're seeming to say that actually, they started earlier, so maybe dance school wasn't the cause of your perfectionism?

[K] I think it definitely raised raise the bar with dance. I think just me being me, I already wanted the best. But with dance as well, it kind of makes it even more specific in everything you do. It really is just the nature of dance, I suppose. So, I think it did get worse with dance. But in terms of academics, it was always like that for as long as I can remember. But dance just made it even worse... not worse. But more important, I think.

[I] And then you say that dance definitely raised the bar in terms of your perfectionism. Do you think there's any specific aspects of the dance training environment which particularly exacerbate or facilitate that perfectionism then?

[K] For sure. I think just the dance world in itself. In terms of technique, you have to work very hard, and the technique has to be exactly right to achieve what the audience wants, for example. So, in terms of technique, that is perfectionism in itself. To achieve the best technique, the cleanest technique, that is just the technical side of dance. So that is just 100% perfectionism in a way. You know, you're striving every day to make it better, to make it perfect. It's just technique. And I think, just also in terms of being a ballet dancer, if that is the end goal, there are many things you have to take into account - how you look or just the whole package. It's just the full package... that is dancing. So, definitely, I think just knowing what you are striving for. You're just constantly striving to be that image. So, I think every day... every day you're just going for perfectionism.

[I] No, I think that's a really good description of it. And then, do you think being a perfectionist has actually impacted on your training and your relationship with dance? For example, whether that be in appraisals or auditions or in other areas? Do you think you've noticed that perfectionism within your dancing?

[K] Definitely, I just have very high standards for myself with the perfectionism. So sometimes you feel like it's not enough. It's never enough because you set the bar so high. But realistically, there's only so much you can do physically and within your capabilities. So it can be quite disheartening when you see yourself and you don't achieve where you want to be, although you are giving everything. And that's just the nature of dance. So, you have to kind of find the balance. But yeah, definitely.

[I] And then, at dance school, how did you find you responded to criticism, whether that be from teachers or those in authority or even parents?

[K] I think you do just accept it. For me anyway. I just completely believed what everyone told me, especially if they were higher up, if they were teachers or dance teachers or just people. So, I did just take that into account completely. And then I didn't really doubt what I was told in terms of criticism or things I needed to work on because I was wanting to be better. So, I did take it in. But obviously, it's the after, isn't it, that you kind of feel like you're not enough... you're worthless. You weren't good enough. Because of that high standard you give yourself, but also because of dance generally, the standards just are very high. So, like, for example, in appraisals. I think it's also the competitive nature of dancing. We are all perfectionists I think to some extent, especially when you do dance because it's just what is drilled into you, day in and day out. But the competitive side I think brings out the worst in the perfectionism because you're already trying to be the best version of yourself. And that should be the only thing you should be striving for - to be the better version of yourself. But with competitiveness, you tend to compare yourself to others and I think that is where it becomes a bit more negative. That's where the positive sides of perfectionism go away and become more negative because you compare yourself, you see things in others that you don't have. And they can be used as a positive way to improve and better yourself, but most of the time, it becomes ... maybe not jealousy, not so much... but just a wanting of that. To be like the others and sometimes it's just not achievable. Sometimes it's what you've been born with, or just things you can't change. So, I think we do have to separate competitive perfectionism and just perfectionism in yourself. If that makes sense.

[I] Definitely, it makes perfect sense. And then you talked about interpreting that criticism, sometimes in a negative way, or it making you feel worthless during your time at dance school. I can imagine that's a very common experience. But since leaving dance school, have you found that you respond to criticism in the same way from those around you, whether that be those in authority, friends, colleagues, again, parents? Do you think there's been any alteration in how you respond to critique, or do you think actually, what you've learned at school has carried with you into your life?

[K] I think it has carried into my life, that's for sure. Because with dancing, there's always someone above you who you are dancing for or who is giving you the advice. And I think at school, we all took it to heart, and we did everything we could in our power to make it better. And that has definitely still carried on. But I think, during my time here, I've been exposed to the bigger world, and I've seen many things that have made me grow as a person. So, while I do still take all that in... I don't know actually; I think depends... I do still take it all in, especially because you're not getting as much feedback and criticism as at school. Because at school, you had someone on you all the time who was looking at you, but now, it's very much like a company setting. So, you have to do it for yourself. So whatever advice you get you, you soak it all in because it's all you're going to get for the next few weeks sometimes. So, in that sense, I would, definitely say there's more importance in everything that is said to me, because they're much fewer, it doesn't happen as often. But at the same time, I think you learn to take it with a pinch of salt as well, because I think I've learned more about myself. So, I take the advice and kind of... not filter it... but make it work for me. Well, I still do, definitely, but I've also learned more about myself, in a sense.

[I] Yeah, that's really, really interesting. Thank you so much. And then I wanted to ask you how you think the standards that you set for yourself actually compare to the standards that your peers set for themselves? Do you think that your personal standards are quite similar to those around you, that

could be colleagues in dance, or it could be individuals outside of dance? Or do you think actually it's quite different? Or does it vary with different sets of friends and colleagues?

[K] I think it does differ. Everyone's different and some people work well under pressure and other people just don't. But I would say yeah, definitely the people around me generally have the same level of standards for themselves. I think we all ask very highly of ourselves. I think it's just the nature of the dance world, especially. So yeah, generally, I think everyone does. There are just an odd few that maybe don't take it so harshly, but that's just what works for them.

[I] Yeah, that's interesting. And do you notice any difference between the standards you set for yourself and maybe friends from outside the dance world or people you've encountered who've never kind of been in ballet set for themselves? Or do you think actually, maybe they're perfectionists in their own way?

[K] I do think they are perfectionists in their own way. Of course, it's not going to be the exact same level, but I think people express it differently and they take it in differently. So, I do have friends outside from dancing who I met through academics, and some of them are very high achievers as well. I will say just as high as me. In terms of academics, they strive for the best and they really put in so much work and I see that as well. Because I have other friends who don't seem to care so much about what they do... I mean of course they care... but you know, although they say that they are stressed for example, or that they are putting in a lot of effort, sometimes I'm not able to see that. But then they might channel that in a different way through more artistic senses, through photography or through hobbies. They will give more effort to things they have interest in. So, I think it's just where you prioritise putting that perfectionism and how you choose to deal with it in your life and how you choose to go with it.

[I] Yeah, no, definitely. And then do you think that your perfectionism has either helped or hindered you in any other areas of your life outside of dance school, for example, in work, in friendships, in romantic relationships? Could you give some examples of maybe where it's helped or where it's hindered, or whichever you feel is relevant?

[K] Okay, that's interesting, actually. Definitely pros and cons. I can agree with that. I think sometimes I do place too much pressure on myself through wanting to achieve so highly. And whilst that can be good - I try and do my best whether that's academics or in dance and I give my everything - sometimes that can be too much. I don't realise the consequences I face later when it's too late. So, in terms of dance, I think by wanting to be so perfect, sometimes you do things that aren't necessarily the best for you. Whether that's through controlling things that you feel like you have under your control, so for example, eating... I know that's a problem for many dancers, it's just another aspect that they can control, and they use that to feel that sense of control which is not necessarily very healthy in the long term and can lead to many eating disorders and all. But generally, I think it is a good thing because with dance, there's never enough... it's never good enough. So, you always have to be more and better. You have to have that motivation to want to be better. Otherwise, without that motivation, you're not going to get anywhere. It has helped in the dance world to get me where I am because it's made me not give up and be resilient and overcome things that I've had to go through to get to where I am today. So that's, the positives. But definitely, sometimes when it's not going so well, you really feel the downs. You feel the lows, and those things feel so bad because you aim so high. So, I think it's just the extremities of the highs and lows that really will hit you when you strive so much. Generally, I think it has been a good thing in dance, for me anyway. And I think for most people... for all dancers... that characteristic is needed to be a good dancer because to spot the little problems and the little faults in your technique, that sometimes you might not be told about and you're the one looking out for, you have to find them through self-practice and just by spending time exploring yourself as a dancer/ artist. Because it's very self-critical, it's just the nature of the world. I think you really have to be a perfectionist to some extent. But in normal life, in terms of academics, it has been good as well. It's meant I focus, and I do well, very much like you, we really just get it done to the highest of our capabilities. It's just in our nature to want to be the best, you know, and I think that's okay? But, yeah, sometimes when things don't go the way you want them to, then I think it does really hit me hard. And I've had to learn to deal with that. But maybe if I didn't strive so high, then I

wouldn't be so bothered about it... it wouldn't be such a big deal to me personally. So, I think that it has affected me, striving so high. But in terms of romantic relationships, I think I've never really had the time. I guess I dedicated myself so much to dancing that I never even thought about it. It was never a problem. But again, because I was striving so much, I was so narrow-minded in a way because of the perfectionism. I never even accounted for... I guess the circumstances as well didn't really work out anyway whilst I was at school or younger because I spent all my time in ballet, but you can see that it has affected me in the sense that it's narrowed my options.

[I] Yeah, that's really, really interesting. Thank you so much. There's so much good stuff here. I'm lapping it up! Then I wanted to ask what you think your relationship is to success. So, do you believe objectively that you succeed as much as more than or less than your peers?

[K] Oof, that's a hard one! In terms of?

[I] So, this could be in terms of dancing, but it could also be in terms of you as a person? Feel free to answer that as one whole or to answer them as two separate options if you'd like.

[K] Okay, it's very difficult. I think I've learned to appreciate myself even more, especially these few years, so I would definitely say not less than, that is for sure. I do know that there are people out there in different circumstances, but I would say I have succeeded in a sense maybe a bit more than, or the same as, others, just in different ways. I think it's hard, I mean, everyone is different, and everyone goes through different things. But I think in terms of my childhood or my dancing, I have succeeded in a sense that I have achieved what I wanted to do. I have moved countries I have lived abroad by myself since I was the age of thirteen to pursue dance because it was my passion. It was what I wanted to do. So, I think not many people would have been able to do that at the time. Definitely looking back, it wasn't the hardest decision I've made, because it was what I wanted to do. In hindsight, I do appreciate that not everyone can do that. Even my sister, she's eighteen and she was struggling to leave home. So, I think in that sense, I have succeeded more than some by leaving my comfort zone and having the opportunity to do what I want to do and being able to actually pursue it full time. But you know, everyone has their own battles, and everyone goes through different things. So, I think my success is mine and everyone else's is theirs. You can't really compare our successes, I suppose, because what everyone has to overcome is so different on so many levels.

[I] Definitely. I think that's a very, very good way of summing it up. And then I'm asking you to step outside yourself now. So, do you think others would view you as successful, whether that be your family or others who know you? Would they view you as objectively successful?

[K] I think it really depends. For example, back to the last question, some of my academic peers who I went to academic school with, I would say would not see me as a success, because in terms of having an academic career, I have not fulfilled that goal because I've chosen to do dancing. So, you know, I am definitely less successful than my peers who have gone on to go to top universities, and continued their studies, for example. So, in that sense, you know, definitely I've not achieved that. So yeah, I think in terms of the academic side of things, people who maybe don't know so much about the dance world and the world of art, they would say that "no, I have not been a success", because I have not achieved what many people would look at as a basic education! Even some of my aunts and uncles, they don't understand what I'm pursuing... that dance is actually a career, of course a short-lived career, but it is a career, it's not just all for fun. It is an art form and it's a passion, it's a life. But for them, they always ask "when am I going to university? When am I going to stop dancing?" They don't realise and you can see to them, I've definitely not been a success. But for my parents, I know that they are so proud of me. They have been my number one supporters and they have seen me overcome, if not just personal, but some real challenges throughout: going to ballet school and graduating. So, I know that my parents would - bless them - say I have not been a failure, that's for sure. Although sometimes you just feel like you've not been able to achieve what you wanted to achieve. So, it just really depends, I think.

[I] That's a great way of looking at it from different perspectives and different facets of your personality, seeing whether each one would be considered successful. It's really interesting. And we kind of touched on these before, but I hoped maybe you could just summarise, even if just in a quick list if you wanted to, what you think the benefits of perfectionism are? And have you felt any of these personally, maybe just a little summary. And then, what do you think are the quote-unquote pitfalls of perfectionism, and have you experienced any of these personally?

[K] Okay, so the benefits of perfectionism. I would say, it raises your bar, it raises the standards, your personal standards for yourself, but also for others. And I think that's very important to be successful in life, to achieve what you want to achieve, to have the motivation to aim high. I think it's important in life to always do the best you can, and to give everything you have. It's very important to give everything you have in all aspects of life. I really do think you should give your everything to what you're passionate about and your family or, you know, just everything you do. I think for me, it just comes naturally. But for others, maybe not so much. But I do think it's important and there are many benefits, and you will do well as a result if you aim high. And of course, you may be able to overcome obstacles that you would otherwise not be able to. But of course, there are many pitfalls to perfectionism and it's easy to see all the negatives. When you demand too much of yourself, often you are the one who has to face the consequences and that may be what you have given yourself. When you demand too highly of yourself, often you are the one who has to face the consequences. And that may be that you gave yourself the pressure and the stress or even, it might be the pressure you received from family or from people around you who expected higher from you. So, it could lead you... not to become depressed but it can lead you to be unhappy with yourself and that can be very toxic if you slip down so low, I think. And it's just all because of the standards you give yourself, so I think, there are definitely pitfalls as well.

[I] Yeah, thank you so much. And then we're moving now onto a slightly more personal section. As I said at the beginning, please feel free to say "I'd rather not answer that" on any of these questions, but they're basically just about you and your relationships or your own life. So, the first one is, do you feel you have maintained strong friendships in your time since leaving dance school? These can be old friendships or new friendships.

[K] Okay. Actually, yes, I really do think I have maintained my friendships. Or I think it's safe to say I think I have managed to keep in good contact with all my closest friends. Because the friends I made in dance school were honestly the friends of my lifetime. And they will be friends for my life. And I think it was so nice for me to meet people who felt the same as me and had the same passion about dance. That was the first time I really came across a group of people who wanted what I wanted. And I think we were very lucky. We had a really great group of people. It wasn't a very toxic environment and, of course, we had our arguments, but it's normal when you all live together. But, you know, I think we really did have a great time and I've actually just been to England and met all of them again. So, definitely, definitely, yes.

[I] And then the next one is: do you feel then that you've had any meaningful romantic relationships in your time since leaving dance school?

[K] Since leaving dance school? Yes, I have. So yeah, actually, I think only because I've left the dance school community. Especially for me, because I wasn't born and raised in England, so even

when we did have time off school, whether it be for half terms and leave outs, I would just go to my Guardian's house and I didn't really have a group of people my age outside of the dance community in England, which is where I was spending the majority of the year. So, I think that really hindered my prospects of meeting different people. And the dance school, we were majority girls, so the boys were in minority, and there was nothing really there. So, actually since leaving that, and just being exposed to the real world, just having to live on my own and be in a new city. And just luck as well, I suppose. Luck and fate and just how everything worked out, but yeah.

[I] And having spoken about those close relationships and friendships you had, if someone spoke to those close friends and family, do you think they would describe you as a perfectionist?

[K] I think so. I know, my dad would because he's the same. He is a perfectionist as well. And it's just the way he is, or he's been brought up as well. And I wouldn't necessarily say he has put that on to me. But I think, seeing him... he's my dad, so of course you idolise your dad as a child. So I think, I just picked things up naturally. Or maybe I just was a bit like that as well so we are very similar. So, I know my dad and my mum as well would definitely say I'm a perfectionist, and I think friends who know me well would say I am.

[K] Yeah, sure. And then, do you ever wish you could lower standards for yourself? Or if given the choice, would you continue to be a perfectionist or maybe even set higher standards for yourself and strive for even greater perfectionism?

[I] No, I think I've learned to be able to handle the things I set for myself. And I really don't think it's ever a bad thing to overachieve and to aim high. I think it can only bring good to aim high because it gives you a motive and it sets you up as a person. And I think it's very important. I really do. But I think it's more the effects and how well you deal with the consequences of setting that bar so high. I think that's what I would change. I would learn to deal with these things better because in the past, I've set the bar so high for myself that I really struggle to face the facts and come to terms if I don't achieve what I want to achieve. So, I think it's only that aspect that I would want to change and learn to handle better.

[I] Yeah, definitely and accept that if you don't hit the bar, it doesn't mean it's a failure. It just means you are striving towards the best you can do.

[K] Exactly. And not to beat myself up for that, because I think a lot of us would.

[I] Definitely, we all fall prey to that, for sure. And then, if you could change anything in the dance world or within dance schools that you think would foster less perfectionist tendencies, what would it be? And would it be the same within dance schools as it would for dance companies like yours now?

[K] That's interesting, too. I've never really thought about this. It's difficult to say because the nature of dance is perfectionism. So, I wouldn't say the dance schools or dance companies would ever encourage you to lower your standards because they want you to strive for better, always better. It's never enough, if anything. But like I said before, I think there's ways to manage it. You know, they could bring in more specialists or people who could help students deal with many of the things we have to go through at ballet school to support them in dealing with these problems. Because when you're young, and especially when you're alone in boarding school, it can be very difficult to take it all on yourself, I think. And obviously, everyone deals with stress differently, but I think just at that age, support for a young dancer, whether it be emotionally or physically, is very important. As is also keeping them as the best version of themselves and helping them to become the best dancer, artist or person they can be. And I will say the same in companies because even when you enter a company, you're always striving to be better because you have to fight for these roles and prove that you are better every day. And if you let that guard down for even just one day, that could be the day that you show something you don't want to show. And if someone sees something, that could be the end ...

okay, not the end, but that can really change someone's perspective on you, which is the last thing you want. So, you know, I think it's just about how to deal with this level of perfectionism and how to ensure that it doesn't become toxic for a dancer or for a person. It's about keeping a healthy relationship with the stress and with the high levels you set yourself. I think that's the most important thing.

[I] Yeah, and you said that actually you wouldn't opt to lower your standards if given the choice, but do you think it would even be possible to lower them over time? Do you think that actually, if you set your mind to it, you could lower your perfectionism, or do you not think you actually could?

[K] If I was conscious about it, maybe I would be able to, but even then, I don't think I would. I think it's just like your instinct. It's just personality. And I don't think you should go out and change your personality. Like I said, it's how you deal with it and maybe just not taking it to heart so much. That's what I've got better at as well over the years. Just, you know, learning to accept things. Things will be the way they are sometimes and some things, many things, are out of your control. So, there's no point stressing about those things that aren't in your control. You can only change what is in your control at the end of the day. So, I think I have got better at that over time.

[I] Definitely. And then this is the last question in this section, then we've got one more section we're done, and it was based on you saying that you didn't grow up in the UK and your family aren't based in the UK. So, do you think that there are any cultural influences which have impacted on your perfectionism or your attitude to setting standards for yourself? Or do you think it's purely a personality thing?

[K] I think there is definitely a cultural thing happening there because in Asia, the standards are very, very high. Parents expect a lot of you. Your society expects a lot from you. And it is kind of drilled into you as young as I can remember, Always the best marks... it's not necessarily in terms of as a person, but in terms of school and in education, you're just always trying to be the best. And that is drilled into us. Like, even the workload level... when I was back in my home country, doing academics, I was up until almost midnight doing schoolwork, because we just had so much, and we were doing such difficult things. If anything, we were doing more than for our age, but that was just the norm and when I went to England, it was a shock. The academic standard, I suppose it was a dance school as well, so you have to take that into account, but just generally the level of even academics was much lower - let alone dance! I think it's just very different. My dance school at home, it was very, very based on your technique. It was very technical. So, it was all about being the best technician. That kind of equated to being the best dancer. And that was what we were brought up with. It just went with dance. So, when I went to England, it was a big shock because it wasn't about how many pirouettes or how many turns you could do or all these tricks you could do. It was all about the basics. Going back to the basics and really securing those basics and creating good foundations and just being an artist, being a person. And I think those values aren't really highlighted in culture at home. So, I think it is very different, culturally they are very different. And when it's instilled in you, it does make a difference, I think. So, I think it has definitely shaped who I am, my upbringing and just the society that I was brought up in. There are so many expectations. I think it's the expectations. You feel the pressure, you do feel the pressure. I know my school wasn't like that, but even some of my friends in normal schools, they were ranked in terms of their grades, and it would be public. So, just things like this. It's just in the culture, to be the best and to be the top, you know?

[I] Sure. Yeah. That's so interesting. I didn't know if you would say there was a cultural element, so for you to say there's a pretty big one is very interesting. And then this last section is slightly different. It's just a few questions and they're basically about how we recall memories. So, everything that you're reflecting on has happened in the past and there's a lot of research that says that over time, how we actually remember things changes. So, you know, when we think back on a memory, we may be experiencing it differently to how we actually did in the moment. So, reflecting on that, I wanted to

ask you when thinking back on these experiences we've spoken about, do you feel any specific emotions. And I've got some examples here such as nostalgia, regret, anger, happiness, sadness, guilt. Or anything else, of course. Do any of those crop up for you?

[K] Yeah. Kind of regrets, I'm not sure if it really counts, but in terms of just being perfect and always striving for perfection. It's hard to accept who you are sometimes. So, like many dancers... you know, we struggle to watch ourselves. We struggle to accept, and we fail to see the good. Sometimes we just criticise because it's just what we do every day. So, I do regret, I'm sure you're the same too, but just looking at videos, even my audition videos, for example. Because, at the time, I was mortified, I was horrified at what I saw, because I just thought it was terrible in all aspects. Really, you know, I didn't see any good. And I think it took me a year, at least a year, to look back - when I was actually filming again to try and make a new reel - and then I actually appreciated for the first time you know, my dancing and how I looked. And I was able to accept and acknowledge, which is a huge step. I know that it wasn't all that bad. And actually, it was quite good in some places. So that is something I regret, not just in this but just in in general life... just not seeing the good sometimes, because we're just so accustomed to seeing the bad over the good. Sometimes that can take the joy out of it. And I think that is what I regret. You know, I regret not fully enjoying that time when I was in it and being able to accept and to just appreciate what I was doing, instead of just criticising and seeing the bad. But that is also what comes with striving so high I suppose. But it is sad when you look back and you see moments that you should have enjoyed, and of course, I was making the most of the situation, but I could have been taking it all in... I think that is a bit sad to see how much time I wasted when I could have been happier.

[I] I think that's really insightful.

[K] And I think that has also kind of taken the joy away from what we do... for me, anyway. Sometimes, I fail to enjoy what I'm doing until... not when it's too late, but until you realise and go "what was I doing?" You know?

[I] Sure, yeah. I think that's a really interesting idea that in the moment, you're beating yourself up so much that you don't actually experience the joy of it until after. So then, building on that, when you look back on your recollections of these experiences, do you think that your memory is accurate? Or do you think it's been in any way impacted over the years, whether that be to view memories more negatively or to view them more positively than you may have done when you were living through them?

[K] I think it really depends on the situation. Sometimes you don't see the gravity of how bad something is until you're out of that environment, for example, because when you are surrounded by something, sometimes that's all you can see. And sometimes you have to leave that situation to realise the effect that it actually had on you. So, I think, yeah, sometimes it just depends. There was a situation where I really thought it was incredible and it was an incredible place. And actually, it was only after certain events happened and I looked from the outside back, that I actually realised it was a very toxic environment. But I really couldn't see that at the time. And now when I look back, I do see both you know, when I look back, I do see the happy memories and the amazing times, but I also am able to acknowledge the not so great and the toxic things that were in full sight, but I just didn't see at the time. But I think we're accustomed to generally just remember the highs as high, or maybe even higher, than they were. And the lows as well. Sometimes, you put so much weight into a bad situation that it feels worse than it is. But generally, I hopefully remember things as they were, but it's just a feeling I think at the end of the day. You remember the feeling more than the memories. The feeling that the memories bring you is what brings the memories back in a way, so you're never going to forget the feeling and how you felt during the good and the bad times. And I think that was the honest perception of what you were going through at the time. And it's only after that you might be able to see things that you didn't see before. That might change and straighten your perception again.

[I] Sure. And then kind of last couple questions. So, this is a pretty simple one. And it's just: how would you rate your overall life satisfaction since leaving dance school? You could maybe do it on a scale of very satisfied to somewhat satisfied to neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, all the way down to very dissatisfied?

[K] Okay, I think I'm satisfied. You know, I think in dance school, for me anyway, I was still kind of finding myself. And we were really in a small, not a small bubble but we really saw what was given to us and we believed everything. And we went through everything together. So, I think the sense of community, it doesn't leave much space for figuring out yourself and your own opinions. I just kind of accepted what was around me and I went with that. Whereas since leaving school, I've become more of an individual. I think I've had to deal with circumstances on my own, so I had no biased opinions or views on my experiences. So, that has been good for me as well. It's been hard sometimes to have to go through that yourself and sometimes feeling lost, but at the end of the day, it has made me grow and become who I am. I think the reason I wouldn't say very satisfied is because, reality and life hit you and I think you also learn to manage that as well and you realise life isn't all glory. It is glorious, but it's not as easy as you may have thought when you were younger at school. Because you were just given what was given to you and you didn't necessarily have to fight or find your own path. But I am very happy, I think. I'm happy in my dancing and in my life. So, you know, I think I'm a happy person now.

[I] And then, having said that you are satisfied, do you think your life satisfaction would improve if your perfectionism rating which you gave me at the very beginning fell – yes or no?

[K] Yes, in terms of if it fell, my standard would be lower so I would be able to achieve what I wanted to achieve easier, or with less difficulty at least. So, I would feel the achievement that came with achieving those things. But I think just deep down, knowing I wasn't striving so high, that in itself would not be pleasing. So, you know, it's a mix.

[I] Yeah. The idea of only semi fulfilling your potential, I guess.

[K] Yes, but in terms of small everyday life and daily things that you encounter, I think you would go through them with less difficulty. So, you might feel like life was easier.

[I] Sure. And I've got two final questions for you, and we're done. So, the first one I wanted to ask is whether you think you can be a perfectionist in ballet and not in other areas of your life. So, do you think that your perfectionism is just contained to the domain of ballet, or does it spread across your life, because studies show that there's different domains and we don't necessarily have to be perfectionist across all of them.

[K] I think it is definitely the most dominant trait in dancing. And in terms of myself, I think that is the root of my perfectionism. And my perfectionism is not the most severe, but in dancing, it becomes very influential in my life. Because of the nature of dancing, and just how important it is to me as I give a lot of weight to dancing, so because of that, the perfectionism increases. And I think in terms of normal life because it is my in my personality and my character already, maybe even dancing aside, I think I do face perfectionism in normal life. But I don't I wouldn't take it so much to heart as I would in dancing. I think that is the difference. But I think my standards are the same. So, across my life, I would say yes. I've just learned that sometimes in dancing, it's worse, because you can't control things. And the amount of what you put in doesn't equate to what you get back. So, I think, in that sense, it's really disheartening sometimes and the weight of it feels very high, so then you feel the downs and the pitfalls show even more. Whereas in normal life, you wouldn't suffer as much, I'd say,

[K] Sure, thank you so much. That is all of my many questions.

[K] Wow, it was really fast. It went very fast.

[I] I'm so glad. I mean, my very final thing to ask before I stopped recording is simply: do you think there's anything I missed or anything you wanted to add that you were expecting me to ask that didn't come up? Or do you think we covered everything you were thinking of?

[K] Actually, we covered more than I was thinking of! Especially with culture as well and the effects that it has on you. You know, a lot of people say they are a perfectionist, but what really makes a perfectionist? And it was really interesting to just explore all the different parts and all the different things that are related to it. So, yeah, it was really interesting. It was a lot of things I had never even really mulled over or associated with it until now.

[I] Ah, I'm so glad to hear that. Hopefully, those deep reflections will translate into my final dissertation! Thank you so much for your time.

[K] A very interesting topic. And you know I think, the fact that it's so present in our everyday lives and you don't really realise that it's dictating so much and how it can be so dangerous as well. So, yeah, it was very interesting, thank you.

End of interview.

