It Felt Electric: Professional Ballet Dancers' Experiences of Creative Confidence in the Creation of New Ballets.

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Abstract

Research suggests that a ballet dancer's creative voice may be marginalised within some professional choreographic environments (Claid, 2006; Kim et al., 2022; Nordin-Bates, 2020). Such marginalisation may mean that choreographic hierarchies which position dancers as subordinate to a choreographer's creative needs (Foster-Sproull, 2017) limit dancers' creative autonomy. However, the dynamic interactions occurring between dancers and choreographers are complex, with diverse factors impacting a dancer's creative confidence during a choreographic process. This research suggests there are opportunities to facilitate creative processes that recognise ballet dancers as equally important to the choreographic process alongside choreographers.

A key aim of this research is to disentangle power within balletic dancer-choreographer relationships by understanding how mutual trust and respect can be present within the choreographic process in developing a new ballet. Additionally, this research investigates how a mutually respectful working relationship may provide an optimal choreographic experience (Foster-Sproull, 2017) for all participants. Building on person-centred (Rogers, 1961) and dancer-centred (Knox, 2013) theories, this research proposes the notion of Ballet-Dancer-Centred Creative Confidence (BDCCC). BDCCC looks at how a ballet dancer's sense of creative confidence may generate artistic dexterity in their contributions to movement, conceptual ideas, or artistic interpretation in a choreographic process.

This study was conducted through qualitative, postpositivist, ethnographic, and grounded theory research involving two semi-structured interviews with five professional ballet dancers who have worked in Aotearoa New Zealand. Themes of dancer-centredness (Knox, 2013), creative confidence (Kelley & Kelley, 2012), relationships of power (Foucault & Gordon, 1980), and optimal experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014) are unpacked and located within a ballet context (Nordin-Bates, 2020). The participant experiences discussed correspond with my experiences as an ex-professional ballet dancer and I have negotiated those experiences of choreographic practice as both an intimate insider (Taylor, 2011) and insider-outsider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) in relation to how I have interpreted participant experiences.

This research has revealed that each ballet dancer holds unique and different perspectives, which may impact their understandings of what is possible in a choreographic process. Significantly, this study seeks to contribute to growing scholarly research placing ballet dancers' experiences at the forefront of the choreographic process as key to the artistic development of new balletic choreography.

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Chapter 1: Introduction—Drawing a Blank

I'm standing in the middle of the studio with my pas de deux partner, all around us there's a buzz from the corps de ballet dancers discussing and going over choreography. The choreographer comes over to us and says, "You two go to Studio 5 and work on your duet, make something together and come back in half an hour and we'll have a look, just make sure it flows!" She promptly turns her attention to a group in the corner. My partner and I look at each other; I can see he's just as puzzled as I am.

In Studio 5, it's silent, we stare at each other again. I'm feeling bewildered, confused, and somehow excited. No one's ever asked me to make choreography before, especially not for a ballet. Yet, the two of us are here, with the lead roles of what was going to be a brand-new ballet, and we had just been given the opportunity to create and contribute movement together. I don't know where to start. How was I ever going to make something worthy of the choreographer? It was her name going in the programme, not mine.

Twenty-seven minutes left and I've drawn a blank. My partner says, "Let's run through what she's set already, then we'll just keep going." His calm confidence gives me a boost. The set material ends with me in a lift on his shoulder. Excellent. We stay in that pose and casually start to discuss interesting ways to get out of the lift, finding one that works. I'm actually starting to feel more confident we can create something together to show her. Our excitement builds as we bounce ideas around and experiment with the intricacies of moving together.

The remaining 20 minutes go by in a flash. Now I'm nervous.

We're walking back to the main studio. My partner and I had made what we thought was great choreography. But what if she doesn't like it? I've never had the chance to create and contribute movement before. I'm just a dancer. We walk through the doors, and she says, "Great, show me what you've got!" I guess we just have to dance and see what happens…

1.1 Without Skill, there is No Confidence

American Choreographer Twyla Tharp (2003) believes that "Creativity is a habit, and the best creativity is a result of good work habits" (p. 7). However, throughout my ballet training and during my professional career, habits were hard-wired into my body and brain, yet creativity as a habit, was not. As a ballet dancer I loved the idea of being able to contribute to a choreographic process, but I constantly doubted my ability, and never felt truly confident, despite the skill I possessed. I lacked trust in myself, and never owned my artistic voice. As demonstrated in the auto-narrative above, it was not until I was asked to create (what I felt was) "something from nothing" that I began to realise I did indeed possess creative capacity. The choreographer, in this instance, was someone I respected, admired, and trusted. I felt secure in the choreographic space she facilitated, yet I held no creative confidence and "drew a blank" when she provided an opportunity to contribute to the work creatively. Perhaps I should have felt empowered and trusted in my ability to generate movement.

Further still, I recall being thrown "off-guard" by the destabilisation to hierarchy she had instigated through her actions. Because of my experience prior to this point, I believed the choreographer is meant to tell me what to do and how to do it. I thought, "*That's what happens in ballet… you just 'do'*." I was confident in my ability, in my skill, when being directed with authority, yet I felt nervous when I was given autonomy to make decisions. The choreographer demonstrated care and interest in what I had to say and offer, however, my reaction was to make myself small and insignificant. At the time I justified this feeling by reminding myself that, "*I'm just the dancer.*" I never even contemplated that a dancer could or should be of equal importance to a choreographer. In subsequent years I worked with many more choreographers, all of whom had their own unique way of working ranging in levels of communication, care, respect, creative contribution, and collaboration. Reflecting on these experiences I realise I approached a choreographic process intent on figuring out what the choreographer wanted so I could deliver to the best of my ability and 'please' them.

As Twyla Tharp (2003) also said, "Without skill, there is no confidence*"* (p. 127), and the idea for this research project materialised during my transition away from performing ballet professionally. Reflecting on my journey, and holding conversations with past and present colleagues, I recognised the potential significance of a creatively confident ballet dancer. I began to wonder, what might happen to ballet dancers and choreography if a dancer's creative capacities were actively nurtured during the making of new ballets? Furthermore, possessing creative confidence is a skill likely to be applicable in all avenues in life, but particularly invaluable within today's professional ballet climate. This has led me to ponder how creative autonomy might also impact a dancer's lived experience, driving me to formulate a research question which delves into the creative experiences of other ballet dancers in the choreographic development of new ballets.

My own story, as the person conducting the research, provides context for the decision to investigate ballet dancers' experiences of creative confidence. However, it is vital to hear from other experts in the field, some of whom are the participants of this study, as their experiences of choreographic practice within the professional ballet dancing realm guide and direct the investigation into Ballet-Dancer-Centred Creative Confidence. The narratives these five professional ballet dancers share, might hold meanings and understandings representative of other ballet dancers, providing voices they may relate to or recognise. Although I have stopped dancing now, I have found myself reflected in the participants of this study, both during the research period, and in my wider dance industry work today. Laura Jones (Section 1.5.5) aptly described, while speaking about a balletic experience that, "It felt electric" to express herself creatively and confidently in performance, and I know what she means. The research in the ensuing pages of this thesis captures five dancers experiences of this electricity.

1.2 The Research Question

Contemplating professional ballet dancers' experiences of creative confidence in choreographic processes engendered a pivotal research question, and the use of the term Ballet-Dancer-Centred Creative Confidence. Thus, prompting me to formulate further inquiry to guide the direction of this research and facilitate a deeper exploration into the creative experiences of the ballet dancers interviewed. When considering professional ballet dancers' experiences of creative confidence in choreographic processes, a key research question emerged:

> *How might a ballet dancer experience creative confidence within the choreography of contemporary ballet?*

This question developed from locating my own feelings and understandings from a ballet-dancers' perspective, having worked in a professional capacity with a range of choreographers. When dancing, I had struggled to articulate my own needs within the choreographic process and was often more focused on attempting to fulfil a choreographer's expectations. I reflected upon the evolution of my own confidence in my creative ability over the course of choreographic processes I had experienced, as well as what I had observed over the years in my colleagues in the same area. This led me to questions surrounding the dancer-choreographer relationship with regard to creativity, power dynamics and optimal experience, from which key sub-questions emerged, including:

> *How might ballet dancers generate creative confidence in the creation of new choreographic works?*

This question acknowledges the importance of creative confidence in the realm of ballet and choreographic practice. Creative confidence refers to a ballet dancer's belief in their own creative

abilities and their capacity to generate choreographic ideas, supporting the notion and appreciating not only technical proficiency, but also the dancer's creative capability to contribute to the development of new choreographic works.

> *How might ballet dancers perceive their creative contributions within choreographic processes?*

This question acknowledges the subjective nature of creative contributions made by ballet dancers within the context of choreographic processes, shifting focus from the objective evaluation of their contributions to an investigation of their individual perceptions. This recognition felt vital, given that the assessment and interpretation of creative contributions are influenced by the dancers' personal experiences and perspectives.

> *How might a choreographic process enable a ballet dancer to engage in an optimal experience?*

This question acknowledges the potential for a choreographic process to facilitate an optimal experience for ballet dancers. Csíkszentmihályi (1990) defines optimal experience as a state of deep engagement, where individuals are fully absorbed in an activity, experiencing a sense of focused concentration and intrinsic motivation, and I wondered whether the creative tasks, collaborative interactions, and artistic challenges involved in choreography may provide the necessary conditions for ballet dancers to enter a state of flow.

> *How might dancers understand the choreographic process of making new ballets in relation to hierarchy and interpersonal relationships?*

This question recognises the potential impact of hierarchy on dancers' understandings and experiences of the choreographic process. It invites investigation into how dancers navigate their roles within the hierarchical structure, as well as the implications of power dynamics for their engagement in and contribution to the creative endeavour. This question also emphasises the significance of interpersonal relationships and how they may influence the overall dynamics and outcomes of the creative process.

With the research questions above in mind, the purpose of this study has become to understand past experiences that professional ballet dancers have had when working with choreographers. Both the key research question, and sub-questions, seek to explore how creativity, hierarchy, and optimal experience can impact a ballet dancer's creative confidence in choreographic processes. This study investigates and provides insight into how creative confidence might exist within dancers'

experiences of dance-making. Further, through the collection and interpretation of narratives from professional ballet dancers who have worked in Aotearoa New Zealand, choreographers within the industry might gain additional insight into how ballet dancers experience choreographic processes, in addition to dancers' recognising their stories reflected in another's. Finally, this research may also benefit those in the wider dance industry, such as tertiary dance students and their educators, or those in preprofessional full-time ballet schools, if choreographic practice or movement composition is part of their tuition and training syllabi.

1.3 Research Aims and Significance

As a former professional ballet dancer, and emerging choreographer, I have been fascinated by the complexity of dancer-choreographer relationships. Considering the dynamic interactions between myself and my colleagues in choreographic processes has led me to be curious about what a dancer might want or need to be creative within choreographic practice. Capturing ballet dancers' voices within this research positions them as essential to the choreographic process. Such positioning in this research may be considered a political standpoint, and a choice to counter hierarchical positioning. This research locates ballet dancers as equally important to the choreographic process as choreographers, which in a broader context within ballet company structures, may place dancers on equal standing to other patrons such as funding bodies and sponsors, or artistic staff and directors. Significantly, this research seeks a voicing of ballet dancers' experiences of choreographic practice, and a disentanglement of choreographic hierarchies, which can tend to position choreographers above dancers. Instead, the study focuses on dancers' experiences of the creative process within a ballet context (Petrides et al., 2006) and places them at the forefront of the research in relation to choreographers. Finally, this study aims to contribute to a developing field of research in ballet, embracing and giving voice to ballet dancers' experiences of the choreographic process: a key aim being to highlight the potential benefits of adopting a ballet-dancer-centred approach to the creation of new choreographies which fosters dancers' creative confidence: Ballet-Dancer-Centred Creative Confidence (BDCCC).

1.4 The Study Overview

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 outlines the methodological approach used. I have used a qualitative (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), postpositivist (Krauss, 2015; Ryan, 2006), ethnographic method (Carter & O'Shea, 2010; Frosch, 1999), with a grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) approach to understanding professional ballet dancers' experiences of choreographic processes. The methods of data collection are discussed, as is my position as a researcher. Ethical considerations are explored, and the process of analysis is presented. To conclude the chapter, the limitations of the research are outlined.

Chapter 3 explores relevant literature pertaining to ballet (Homans, 2013) dance-making (Foster-Sproull, 2017) and creativity (Amabile, 1983). Through key research in the domain of dancer-centredness (Knox, 2013) based in person-centred theory (Rogers, 1961), this section explores challenge-skill balance and optimal experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014) within dance-making. It also investigates the dancer-choreographer relationship that occurs within studio environments (Baron, 2020), with particular reference to self-esteem (Maslow, 1943) and motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Additionally, confidence within creative processes is discussed, and situated within choreographic practice in professional ballet environments.

In Chapter 4 the dancers' voices come to the forefront of the research and their experiences of creative confidence within choreographic practice in professional ballet environments are analysed. This section explores a range of participant experiences through a grounded theory lens (Chun Tie, Birks & Francis, 2019; Strauss & Corbin, 1994), looking particularly at conditions where a creatively confident dancer-choreographer relationship might occur. A concluding analysis draws together the participants' experiences to articulate further key findings surrounding respectful dancer-choreographer relationships in relation to creative confidence beyond the physical expectations of a ballet dancers' job.

Chapter 5 concludes the thesis by outlining key discoveries, and proposing some recommendations for practice, policy, and future research on BDCCC.

1.5 Research Participants

Within the following pages, five research participants are introduced (in alphabetical order): Abigail Boyle, Tabitha Dombroski, Rhiannon Fairless, Ariana Hond, and Laura Jones. These dancers have diverse experiences, having worked within ballet-company environments and independent arenas in Aotearoa New Zealand. Their ages at the time of interview ranged from early 20s to mid-30s, with careers of between 4 and 20 years; all are still involved in professional dance in some capacity.

Prior to formally introducing the participants and sharing their narratives throughout the course of this study, it seems vital to acknowledge that they all may have distinct views, understandings and needs within choreographic processes. These may include being valued as a collaborator and recognised for their creative input; having clear initial choreographic direction whilst being valued and recognised as a collaborator; being guided and directed by the choreographer within a hierarchy, and not having ownership over choreographic material; being curious about choreography and lacking confidence; and having clear choreographic direction within a hierarchy with artistic interpretation only, not generating choreographic material.

I was excited to interview these participants because I have known of, respected and admired their work for many years, and I expected the wealth of knowledge and experience across the five of them would have huge breadth. I was also looking forward to starting conversations about ballet and choreographic complexities, as I had not personally had a lot of these discussions during my own dancing days. I approached this part of the research process with the agenda not to fix anything, but to share and connect over moments often filled with passion, regardless of the difficulties we sometimes face in such a competitive industry.

1.5.1 Abigail Boyle

Abigail is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's most recognised ballerinas of her time. Her work prior to retirement has left quite a legacy. Prior to her very successful and long-standing career, Abbie trained pre-professionally in ballet full-time, going straight from her graduation into working with the Royal New Zealand Ballet. After retiring she formed her own business for coaching preprofessional ballet dancers, and now works with the New Zealand Youth Ballet Company. Abbie also still performs freelance with ballet companies in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Photo credit: Ross Brown

I already had a deep admiration for Abbie as an artist: most memorably, watching her fiery coldness as Myrtha, Queen of the Willis, in Giselle when I was 10 years old. Upon meeting her, I found the detailed articulation she had always created through her dancing was mirrored in the way she spoke. Our discussions were incredibly analytical and thought-provoking. I was not surprised to discover Abbie enjoys a challenge yet is very selfless. I appreciated the logic, honesty and grounding in which she shared her views, and the rich descriptions and gestures she would use as she spoke.

1.5.2 Tabitha Dombroski

Tabitha has made the most of the opportunities in her career from its outset. She trained at full-time ballet schools in Aotearoa New Zealand and Germany. After completing her training, she performed professionally with ballet companies in Germany and Austria before returning home to Aotearoa New Zealand during the COVID-19 pandemic to perform freelance work throughout Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia. Tabi is now based in Wellington, also choreographing her own original works, teaching ballet, and completing her Bachelor of Psychology.

Photo credit: Carlos Quezada

In the small Aotearoa New Zealand dance world, Tabi and I had known of each other since we were 11 years old, yet our first official conversation was in early 2021. Whilst training we would often attend the same dance events and I remember watching her dancing and admiring the calm, confident energy she exuded in class. Knowing Tabi now, I am moved by her deep intelligence and the profound sensibility she holds about the world, both within ballet and beyond. She is observant in the most empathic and understanding way, and I got to see this first hand during our choreographic intensive with The Classical Collab in 2022. Every part of our conversations for this research held a depth and care which I appreciated hugely.

1.5.3 Rhiannon Fairless

Rhiannon is a midcareer artist and has spent her time wisely with the ballet companies she has chosen to work with. Rhi grew up in Aotearoa New Zealand and at a young age moved to Australia to train pre-professionally at The Australian Ballet School. After graduating she went on to work and perform with The National Ballet of Canada and the Royal New Zealand Ballet. She is currently living in Germany and dancing with the Bayerisch Staatsballet in Munich, where she has been for the last three years, and has just completed a Bachelor of Science.

Photo credit: Ballerina Project CA

Meeting Rhiannon for the first time, I was immediately struck by the bright, yet understated confidence she displayed. I have never seen her perform live, but during my research I watched any video snippets that I could find. She is a captivating dancer to watch, a standout being her striking strength and fluidity in George Balanchine's *Diamonds*. In our conversations, Rhi spoke with deep consideration, and I appreciated the attention she paid to the intricacies of what we were discussing. Her direct way of communicating made it easy to understand her views and feelings.

1.5.4 Ariana Hond

Ariana's performing career led her across the ditch to Australia, but she had made a name for herself within the Aotearoa New Zealand ballet community before leaving the country, with her competition success at a young age. Ariana grew up in Auckland and moved to Australia to pursue her full-time ballet training pre-professionally prior to dancing with Queensland Ballet, and Melbourne City Ballet. She first secured an apprentice job, then quickly progressed into higher ranks. Since, she has moved back to Aotearoa New Zealand to pursue a postgraduate psychology degree and performs regular freelance work in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Photo credit: National Photography Australia

I have followed Ariana's career ever since she won the silver medal and Audience Choice Award at the Genée International Ballet Competition in 2012. I was a couple of years younger at the time, but I was starstruck by her radiant personality on stage, her refined technique, and the elegance she projected in performance. Her infectious energy, I remember from the Genée, was the very same I felt during our interviews. Her enthusiasm, thoughtfulness, and way of describing meaningful moments showed me how much people matter to her. It was so moving to share the heartfelt and honest discussions we did, both relevant to the ballet world, and to life.

1.5.5 Laura Jones

Laura's career progression in ballet was incredibly fast: a true testament to her dedication and deep love of the art form. Laura is a New Zealander who was born and raised in Australia. She moved back to Aotearoa New Zealand to pursue her full-time ballet training at the New Zealand School of Dance, and upon graduation went straight on to dance with the Royal New Zealand Ballet for five years. Since then, Laura transitioned into freelance performance work across Aotearoa, New Zealand and Australia, and has also completed her stunt work certificate.

Photo credit: Stephen A'Court

Prior to ever meeting Laura, I distinctly remember a picture of her in the studio entrance hall which I admired on the many regular trips I made to Wellington for training at the New Zealand School of Dance between the ages of 9 and 13 years old. Meeting Laura properly in our first interview, the same calm, warm, sophisticated energy radiated from her. I was struck by the excitement she had to talk with me, and we had philosophical discussions on many topics beyond the information included in this thesis. Her generosity, kindness, and thoughtful approach to our conversation struck me. The following year I got to see her perform live in *Half Life* by Loughlan Prior, and it felt like such a privilege to see her tender performance in that work.

1.6 Framing Meanings Within This Research

To contextualise the research, particularly BDCCC, it is vital to understand who the participants are as well as their backgrounds and/or motivations. It is also as valuable to understand the key terms used throughout the course of this study, to then understand the research questions and the direction of the research (Krauss, 2015). Through combining an understanding of the participants' backgrounds with a grasp of the key terms used, the ensuing chapters provide a holistic view of the study, with the aims of drawing meaningful conclusions and situating the research within broader academic and societal contexts (Denscombe, 2007).

My research was initially structured around collaboration within choreographic processes, to which Knox's (2013) dancer-centred theory provided foundation. This research developed a key focus on creative confidence within choreographic processes, drawing on dancer-centredness to understand creative confidence for ballet dancers, particularly the transactions occurring within choreographic rehearsals (Baron, 2020; Foster-Sproull, 2017). The following sections outline the key components that have contributed to the research in a foundational sense: dancer-centredness, choreographic practice, and creative confidence within a professional ballet environment, alongside other key defining terms: contemporary ballet, didactic and democratic dance facilitation, optimal experiences, challenge-skill balance, and flow-states.

1.6.1 Dancer-Centred Choreographic Practice

The dancer-centred paradigm (Knox, 2013, 2019) builds upon American Psychologist Carl Rogers' 1939 person-centred theory (Rogers, 1939). Person-centredness (Rogers, 2000), within the dance realm, relates to a dancer-centred process featuring self-actualisation, decision-making, agency, and new approaches to power structures (Knox, 2013). Knox's (2013) research highlighted the lack of dancers' voices within choreographic processes (Roche, 2011) and discussed how the processes could therefore be perceived as predominately choreographer-centred. Finding an alternative approach to her research saw Knox question how person-centred processes and relationships (Rogers, 1961, 1969, 1977, 1980; Rogers & Stevens, 1967) might be used to understand a dancer's agency within the choreographic process, thus positioning the dancer and their experience as central to the dance-making process. Extending on Knox's (2013) research, Foster-Sproull (2023) created the prosumer-dancer paradigm (PDP), and the prosumer-dancer activations of choreographic technique (PACT; Foster-Sproull, 2023). Her research highlighted dancer agency and self-actualisation in choreographic practice through the economic lens of prosumer theory (Toffler, 1981). Foster-Sproull's (2017; 2023) research looked at the transactions of the dance-making process as a microeconomy and proposed that a facilitative choreographic process may enable dancers to produce choreographic material in the act of consuming it. The concept and process of *prosumption* (Toffler, 1981; 2022) as used in Foster-Sproull's (2017; 2023) research provides context and insight into the inner workings of choreographic

processes, and also advocates for dancers' voices in professional dance environments. Baron (2020) drew upon the dancer-centred paradigm contextualised by Knox (2013) and Foster-Sproull (2017) and extended it into practice within the studio rehearsal space. She investigated rehearsal processes, looking specifically into the experiences of dancers and how a dancer-centred approach may be of benefit to the rehearsal directors within that environment.

Whilst drawing upon the nuanced perceptions of Knox (2013), Foster-Sproull (2023), and Baron (2020) to both locate and understand a ballet-dancer-centred paradigm, throughout the thesis I also speak about dynamic interactions regarding the relationships between dancers and choreographers. Dynamic interactions between people refers to the nonlinear ways in which individuals influence each other and are influenced by each other in social situations (Dumas & Fairhurs, 2021). These interactions can involve feedback loops, and changes in behaviour / emotions within interdependent relationships, such as between a dancer and choreographer.

1.6.2 The Classical Ballet Dancer and the Contemporary Ballet Dancer

Professional ballet dancers can be viewed as highly skilled artists and athletes (Gamboa et al.2008; Koutedakis & Jamurtas, 2004) who perform complex repertoires that require aesthetic and athletic ability (Downs, 2013; Gamboa et al., 2008; Koutedakis & Jamurtas, 2004; Twitchett, 2010). The five ballet dancers who participated in this research are positioned as professional performers and "intelligent beings" (Knox, 2013, p. 39), with ranges of experience in both independent work and ballet company environments. The duration of a ballet performance career is relatively short (Turner & Wainwright, 2003), with dancers retiring, on average, by their mid-30s (Roncaglia, 2006). The careers of the ballet dancers in this research vary in length, with some dancers being early into or midway through their professional dancing days, while some have retired from performing on stage but are still involved within the professional ballet industry. Further, acknowledging the dancers' diverse careers and experiences also highlights their "myriad of needs, wants, focuses, goals, and roles, that position them as being unique, individual, and not generalisable" (Foster-Sproull, 2017, p. 24). The dancers' experiences may be viewed as complex and varied, and they have provided a rich collection of participant examples.

Within a classical ballet company, there can be contemporary repertoire that dancers are expected to perform, particularly when choreographers are creating new works (Noice & Noice, 2006). Throughout this thesis I use the term contemporary ballet to describe the combination of classical ballet technique with modern dance movements. Contemporary ballet can be described as "a new set of narratives of and for ballet histories" (Farrugia-Kriel & Jensen, 2020, p. 2), explaining that the style is an evolving genre that is constantly redefining itself. Contemporary ballet has been influenced by a wide range of choreographers, including George Balanchine, Crystal Pite, Twyla Tharp, Merce

Cunningham, and William Forsythe. Some theorists also propose that contemporary ballet has been shaped by cultural and social trends, such as postmodernism and the increasing emphasis on diversity and inclusivity in the arts (Lutts, 2019; Wulff, 2008).

Ballet as a profession is understood by some dance scholars as one of dedication, discipline, scrutiny and critique (Pickard, & Risner, 2020), and full of comparison, competitiveness, power imbalances, and deference to authority (Kim et al., 2022). Further, a professional ballet career is may also contain, and find value in, silencing physical and emotional pain (Pickard & Risner, 2020; Kim et al., 2022). However, some approaches to choreographic practice actively encourage the 'voice' of the dancer to be articulated verbally as well as physically, in both process and performance (Butterworth, 2004; Knox, 2013). Within some choreographic practices a dancer may experience multiple shifts in roles as dance-maker, collaborator, and dancer (Knox, 2013), which can mean their ability to have a voice can vary. Throughout this research, the participants shared a range of experiences of creative confidence when working with choreographers on the development of contemporary ballet, and all acknowledged varying moments during their experiences where they had felt positioned as a dance-maker, collaborator, or dancer.

1.6.3 Didactic to Democratic Dance-Making Processes

Dance scholar Jo Butterworth (2004) has created a scale of contemporary dance-making processes showing the range between didactic to democratic. The scale is relevant to a ballet environment, particularly contemporary ballet choreographic processes, because, as Butterworth (2004) has argued, the traditional didactic hierarchical structure of dance education, in which the teacher, director or choreographer is seen as the sole authority and whom the dancers are expected to follow, is outdated. Instead, Butterworth (2004) has proposed a more democratic, or collaborative approach, in which everyone's ideas and experiences are valued. Further, in Butterworth's (2004) model, speaking specifically within a dance education realm, she has noted that the teacher acts as a facilitator rather than as an authoritarian figure, guiding students through the creative process while encouraging them to contribute their own ideas and perspectives. This approach, as the author has discussed, promotes greater creativity and innovation, and encourages students to take ownership of their own learning and development, which aids in improved levels of creative confidence in dancers.

Newall and Fortin's (2012) research on collaborative scales of dance-making processes has built upon Butterworth's (2004) scale by exploring the role of collaboration in the creative process. They have argued that dance, among other art forms, is a collaborative endeavour that requires the input and expertise of a range of different individuals, from choreographers and dancers to musicians and designers (Newall & Fortin, 2012).

Additionally, Newall and Fortin (2012) have suggested that the creative process is not solely the purview of the choreographer, but rather a collective effort with everyone involved and with all voices heard. Newall and Fortin (2012) have advocated for a collaborative approach to dance-making that emphasises communication, openness, and a willingness to experiment and take risks (Newall & Fortin, 2012). By choreographers and dancers working together, Newall and Fortin (2012) have argued, more innovative and exciting ways of dance-making can occur and may also be more inclusive or representative of diverse perspectives and experiences. This is relevant to ballet-dancer-centred research because creative confidence (see Section 1.6.4) involves taking individuals' experiences into account as a way of adding value to a choreographic process.

1.6.4 Creative Confidence

Tom Kelley and David Kelley pioneered the study of creative confidence (Kelley & Kelley, 2012). They are innovation researchers, authors, founders, and partners of *IDEO*, a leading innovation and design firm, and creators of the Design School at Stanford University. Kelley and Kelley (2013) have stated that the core of creative confidence is believing in your own ability to create change, present your ideas to others, and have an impact on the world around you. Kelley and Kelley (2013) believe that possessing personal conviction you can achieve what you set out to do, and having self-assurance and belief in your own creative capacity to innovate has the biggest influence on consolidating individuals' confidence in creative spaces.

Clements & Nordin-Bates (2022) have discussed how there may be various expectations placed on dancers to contribute creatively within a choreographic process, irrespective of their confidence or ability to create. These expectations may include generating movement and choreographic material, responding to tasks, and/or sculpting an emotional or conceptual idea through a work (Butterworth, 2004; Knox, 2013; Lavender, 2006; Roche, 2011). Tasking may be involved where the choreographer invites dancers to respond and create material around propositions, "problems, or questions" (Knox, 2013, p. 42). Ballet can often see dancers directed in what, when, and how they should perform steps or movements with little opportunity to question it creatively (Claid, 2006). Additionally, preprofessional ballet training rarely involves teaching in choreographic composition (Clements & Nordin-Bates, 2022). Nordin-Bates (2020) has proposed that self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000), can be used to understand how creativity is nurtured or limited in ballet education. Within Clements and Nordin-Bates' (2022) research, they uncovered that support for dancers' autonomy was more common in contemporary dance than in ballet classes, and many dancers in their study struggled to see how the rigor and discipline of ballet training could be combined with individuality and creativity.

Not all choreographic processes require dancers to contribute creatively. However, the limited education for ballet dancers in choreographic composition can challenge their levels of confidence when creative contribution is required. Kelley and Kelley (2013) claim that anyone can gain creative confidence, however Fink and Woschnjak (2011) have suggested that creative challenges may be particularly evident when a choreographer asks a ballet dancer to generate movement or respond to tasks, particularly if the dancer does not feel confident. The participant narratives in this research range in conviction, enjoyment, and experiences of fulfilment in regard to developing creative confidence, while acknowledging that meaningful dynamic interactions can be impacted by their relationship with the choreographer. Considering the participant experiences has led me to question how a ballet dancer could be creatively confident and feel supported by their choreographer, even when they may not particularly enjoy generating choreographic material. This, therefore, prompted investigation into what may need to occur in choreographic processes to allow BDCCC to exist.

1.6.5 Flow State, Optimal Experience and Challenge-Skill Balance
Pioneered by psychologist Mihaly Csíkszentmihályi, Flow State is a theory of the experience colloquially known as "being in the zone" (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014), and has been further developed by Nakamura and Csíkszentmihályi (2020) who defined the notion of creative flow by identifying the following six factors: intense and focused concentration on the present moment; merging of action and awareness; loss of reflective self-consciousness; sense of personal control or agency over the situation or activity; distortion of temporal experience, as one's subjective experience of time is altered; and experience of the activity as intrinsically rewarding. These six key factors interest me in relation to this research because they describe patterns, behaviours and feelings dancers may describe when talking about performing (Koutedakis & Jamurtas, 2004; Royce, 2004). Additionally, Cherry (2014) mentioned three other components as being a part of the flow experience including immediate feedback, feeling the potential to succeed, and feeling so engrossed in the experience that other needs become negligible. These additional three factors are possibly more relevant to the potentials of the choreographic process, rather than performance.

Flow State is described as being in a state of complete concentration on an activity, or fully absorbed in the situation at hand (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990). In relation to this research, flow state may help ballet dancers to develop their creative confidence by allowing them to fully engage in the creative process and trust their instincts in performance (Jackson & Csíkszentmihályi, 1999; Kelley & Kelley, 2012). Achieving flow state (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990, 2014) may occur by aligning challenging choreographic material with a dancer's artistic and technical skillset (Foster-Sproull, 2017). This suggests that by achieving a state of flow, ballet dancers may feel more connected to their bodies, their movements, and their creative impulses, potentially leading to a greater sense of confidence and creativity in their work.

Csíkszentmihályi (1990) also pioneered the concept of Optimal Experience in which he theorises that people are happiest when they are in a state of flow and are able to lean into positive feelings, or motivational inclinations, which can aid in a person's confidence (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990; 2014). When fully immersed in an activity, motivation combined with functioning at a certain level of clarity allows a person's actions to occur almost inadvertently, intuitively, with their inherent skills being utilised (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990). Csíkszentmihályi (2014) refers to this as a "challenge-skill balance, merging action and awareness" (p. 110). An intrinsic sense of motivation is about doing something for its own sake rather than approval of others or other external rewards (Deci, 2020; Rheinberg & Engeser, 2018). Challenge-skill (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990) can be an intrinsically and extrinsically motivating state that occurs when an individual is fully immersed in an activity that offers a high level of challenge and requires a corresponding level of skill. Within this research, a challenge-skill balanced approach could be applicable to ballet dancers' high levels of motivation and ballet being an industry which encourages dancers to always strive to be better artistically and technically (Harrison, 2021). In relation to creativity and confidence in choreographic ballet environments, in this study, experiencing a challenge-skill balance was regarded as important for the five participants. However, obstacles to achieving this balance may arise if the challenge level is too high and the individual's skills are not yet developed, or if the individual's skills exceed the level of challenge presented (Nakamura & Csíkszentmihályi, 2014).

Chapter 2: Research Methodology—Traversing the Creative Landscape

This chapter profiles the qualitative methodologies and study design used to explore the experiences and narratives of professional ballet dancers within a collaborative choreographic process in Aotearoa New Zealand. Within this chapter I discuss the methods of data collection and theory of analysis that went into understanding how the creative process impacts ballet dancers' experiences of dance-making. A qualitative, semi-structured interview approach was undertaken through a postpositivist (Ariail Reed, 2023; Krauss, 2015; Ryan, 2006), ethnographic lens (Carter & O'Shea, 2010; Frosch, 1999) to articulate the nuances of dancers' experiences of choreographic collaboration. This approach was further focused through grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1994) with the awareness that each dancer's response to their experiences of a choreographic process may be complex and diverse, and that within these interpretations it is difficult to eliminate bias (Clark & Vealé, 2018). Additionally, the qualitative, semi-structured interview approach was important so that the research could respond to questions and contexts throughout the course of the investigation (Grossberg et al., 1991; Wildemuth, 1993). It is important to acknowledge that it was the dancers' diverse experiences which have provided scope and value to the research.

Within this methodology chapter, I explain the positioning of the research through a wider postpositivist (Section 2.1), ethnographic (Section 2.3), and grounded theory lens (Section 2.4), and its relevance to the research query and aims. Following this, the data collection methods are discussed (see Section 2.5), as is my position as the researcher (Section 2.6) where I assess my own dance background and the subjectivity / reflexivity it may inherently bring. This leads to outlining the ethical considerations of the research (Section 2.7), and the process of analysis of participant experiences (Section 2.8), which includes the connecting themes and paradigms through which I continue to explore this research. Finally, I discuss the limitations of the research (Section 2.9).

2.1 Qualitative Research

The qualitative approach to this research allowed participants to find and interpret meanings within their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I also attended closely to what and how the dancers articulated their experiences as a way of assembling unmeasurable information (Lewis, 1997). The research gathered dancer experiences of collaboration through conversations about feelings and behaviours present within past choreographic processes. Building upon this through further analysis, attention was drawn to the environmental factors that may have affected dancers' experiences and the meaning found within. Specific focus was placed upon the studio rehearsal space as this was where the choreographic processes happened. As was apparent through the data gathering, the conditions within particular environments can impact participants' perspectives on their positioning within situations (Hutchison, 2018), which also supports the qualitative approach taken to data collection. A process that responds personally to each individual participant allows for a flexible meaning-making

process (Ryan, 2006), which, therefore, allows more room for interpretation than concrete numbers or facts (Lewis, 1997; Knox, 2013). A qualitative research approach to participant interviews let the dancers speak to what was most important and relevant to them, allowing for flexibility, meaning making and multiple themes to emerge (Ryan, 2006). The qualitative approach also allowed for speculation about future choreographic processes within the wider ballet industry, pulling focus both from and toward the positioning of individual's ontologies, epistemologies and personalities (Green & Stinson, 1999) within the platforms professional ballet companies provide.

2.2 Postpositivist Research

A postpositivist approach to this research was used because exploring participant experiences through a qualitative lens is complex, and diverse participant experiences may tangle together (Ariail Reed, 2023). This study utilises a postpositivist approach, as it does not aim to express a singular unified perspective; rather, it shares a range of experiences and opinions (Ryan, 2006). Postpositivist (Ryan, 2006) and qualitative (Green & Stinson, 1999) research can complement each other as they allow the research to be influenced by what the researcher observes. Postpositivist research recognises that realities can be fallible, inexact, and approximated (Ariail Reed, 2023; Charney, 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1985) which can be considered as disrupting the 'certain' and attending to the complex array of factors that can impact research. This type of research attempts to present a wide range of truths rather than to find an objective truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Reimer, 1996). The postpositivist lens became an appropriate choice for this research as it seeks to investigate what is meaningful and relevant in the context of choreographic collaboration within ballet companies (Green & Stinson, 1999; Guba & Lincoln, 1985) in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The participants involved in this research have all danced within professional ballet companies in Aotearoa New Zealand, which provides a unifying context and direction for the discussion and analysis of their experiences. However, their opinions, experiences, and thoughts are unique, because their careers and choreographic experiences within the ballet industry are diverse. These individual contributions may be viewed as "rich in meaning, particularly in the context of individual experience" (Krauss, 2015, p. 758). This directly relates to collaboration within choreographic processes, as the practice of dance-making involves a range of elements such as the body, lived experience, and the creative contributions of many people (Knox, 2013) as my interview data reveals. Although this research investigates how choreographic collaboration has been experienced by professional ballet dancers, it does not aim to seek one particular truth (Silk et al., 2005). Rather, it seeks to analyse personal narratives and participant experiences so that themes may be assessed. Within this research, the qualitative, postpositivist paradigm allows for any inherent subjectivities to "evolve as the research grows" (Foster-Sproull, 2017, p. 12). This acknowledges that the research data is complex and allows opportunities to bring multiple truths to light. As dance itself and the process of dance-

making are not unequivocally explicit, the postpositivist lens in this research allows individuals' stories and experiences to be valued.

2.3 Ethnography

Ethnographically, this research positions itself within the context of professional ballet choreography. Ethnography is broadly understood as seeking understanding of a particular community or group's 'climate'. In this research it is the cultural nuances of the choreographic community that I focus on as a means of deepening knowledge (Carter & O'Shea, 2010; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010) within the wider realm of dance. This ethnographic approach recognises that undertaking such a study requires recognising the human participants' rich experiences (Genzuk, 2003). With this at the forefront, I recognise that the experiences, narratives and data shared during interviews came firstly from people (Frosch, 1999), and as a matter of respect, I value all personal information.

Contextually, this research sought to consider the participants as 'people who are dancers', rather than simply 'dancers' (Barbour, 2013). To extend upon Barbour's (2013) proposition, I focused this study through the choreographic realm of a ballet context. Therefore, taking care of the ethnographic area of this research meant keeping in mind that it is both researching and "writing about people" (Frosch, 1999, p. 258) from the unique ballet community in Aotearoa New Zealand. The research has been viewed in its ethnographic context (Frosch, 1999), by considering cultural and historical factors such as social status, political views, belief systems and customs (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010), and the backgrounds of the relevant group of dancers. By delving into the multifaceted dimensions of the dancers' cultural and historical backgrounds, the research provides a foundation for understanding how these factors may enable opportunities for dancers and choreographers to connect, creating a choreographic community by facilitating sustainable dance-making practices (Barbour, 2008).

2.4 The Grounded Theory Research Paradigm

Grounded theory was first introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and has since been further developed by other scholars. Grounded theory involves constructing theories through the processes of data collection and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Experts within the grounded theory research field, Corbin and Strauss (2008), have proposed that applying grounded theory to research is to "change, through process, into the method" (p. 5). Within the context of this research, grounded theory has provided an opportunity to identify emergent themes through the interviews, rather than pre-deciding key points for analysis and discussion. From a dancer-centred perspective (Knox, 2013), this meant acknowledging there is no one 'true' reality (Mills et al., 2006). Unpacking the participant experiences has resulted in a nuanced focus on individual experiences which is detailed in its analysis (see Section 2.8.1), amalgamating people, groups and experiences.

A grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was selected to enable responsiveness to the experiences of the participants in this study. Within choreographic processes there may be various facilitative approaches which may naturally create places for the diversity of dancers' experiences. Engaging with the participant experiences through grounded theory, as a "structured, yet flexible methodology" (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 1) has allowed for iterative scaffolding of the data representing the participants' stories.

2.5 Methods of Data Collection

In this section I discuss the two methods of data collection utilised in the research: a literature review and semi-structured interviews. The literature review sought to situate this study within current scholarly research in ballet and choreographic practice and provide context for the necessity of further investigation in the ballet domain. In addition, it provided a grounded theoretical base to connect to the interview element of data collection. The semi-structured interview process was undertaken with the aim of identifying themes, arising through conversation, for discussion and analysis. In the interviews I placed importance on identifying that my participants, as dancers, are people first. I chose to view them as people-who-dance, acknowledging that what they bring into a space is more than the articulation of their bodies.

2.5.1 Literature Review

Relevant scholarly literature was gathered to consider and assess the research in the following areas: choreographic processes (Butterworth, 2004; Gardner, 2011; Knox, 2013; Foster-Sproull, 2017), power theory (Foucault & Gordon, 1980; Green, 2003; Harrison, 2021), confidence and creativity (Amabile, 2012; Kelley & Kelley, 2012), and optimal experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014). These topics were first assessed individually and then within the context of a classical ballet company to best understand where this study may be situated within existing research. The analysis of the literature also helped me to understand how this study might first harness and then build upon the existing scholarly works within the choreographic realm, and how collaborative choreographic processes might be piloted into the specific space of professional ballet dancing.

Research by dance scholars Sarah Knox (2013), Sarah Foster-Sproull (2017, 2023) and Sarah Baron (2020) provided the foundation for this study. These authors have all researched extensively within the contemporary dance realm, with their work becoming the seed that allowed this study to be directed into a ballet context. Knox (2013) provided the propositions of dancer-centred dance-making, accounting for agency and collaboration as key to dancers' experiences of the choreographic process. Foster-Sproull (2017, 2023), provided a framework for understanding the complex relationships between dancers and choreographers, attending to the exchanges between all participants involved in

creative choreographic processes. Baron (2020) guided how we might understand optimal experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014) for dancers within the rehearsal environment.

After researching the contemporary choreographic literature, I explored the vital, but limited, existing ballet scholarship to contextualise the study further. The key theorists and relevant domains were: dance historian and critic Jennifer Homans (2013); Wulff (2008), for the historical lineage and information on the structure and practices in ballet; Turner & Wainwright (2003), Wainwright et al. (2006) for sociological and relational ballet research; Kim et al. (2022) and Kelman (2000), for scholarship on ballet dancing as an occupation; dance scholars Lucie Clements and Sanna Nordin-Bates (2022), Nordin-Bates (2020) and Fink and Woschnjak (2011) for locating choreographic and creative experiences within the professional ballet world. To corroborate this literature, I searched the music and dance section in the General Library at the University of Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand, and also online databases and journals, including JSTOR, Taylor &Francis Online, and Google Scholar. This process of investigation involved "viewing and reviewing" (Hanstein, 1999, p. 37) theory to explore the need for further research into collaborative choreographic processes in professional ballet. Key terms examined through my literature search included: person-centredness, dancer-centredness, creative confidence, choreographic facilitation, choreographic practice, creative process, dynamic interactions, and optimal experience.

2.5.2 Participant Interviews

I chose to employ semi-structured interviews as my second data collection method as a means to fully appreciate "what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions" (Weiss, 1995, p. 1). Participant interviews focused on the experiences, and meanings of those experiences, of five dancers working within the professional ballet context in Aotearoa New Zealand. Semi-structured interviews diverge from structured interviews as they are flexible based on the content arising throughout the course of the interview, meaning that the dialogue is adaptable to any matters that may emerge (Wengraf, 2001).

I conducted two one-hour interviews with five professional ballet dancers in Aotearoa New Zealand. Conducting two interviews further implemented a grounded theory approach as it allowed key emergent themes to be more deeply investigated in a second conversation (Wengraf, 2001). Through this I was able to amass various rich narratives, personal stories, perspectives, views and attitudes towards choreographic processes within professional ballet dancing, highlighting the diversity of experiences possible within the industry.

I anticipated that using a qualitative postpositivist ethnographic lens to conduct the interviews would allow for multiple personal anecdotes, perspectives, and attitudes to be explored during conversations

with the participants. In alignment with grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1994), I was not looking for anything in particular upon entering the interview phase of data collection, rather to establish whether common themes would emerge. Our interviews took place in person in a range of locations; I would travel to or meet the participants in a location of their choice, the purpose being to speak in environments comfortable for them. Prior to beginning the interviews, the participants were sent a list of topics we would cover, with the hope of prompting narratives on choreographic processes they had experienced. It also gave participants time to reflect and choose what they wanted to share and, in turn, encourage them to discuss the experiences that were important to them, giving depth of meaning (Hanstein, 1999) (Section 2.5.1). Throughout the conversations there were moments where I would also share stories and experiences; my positioning is discussed in more detail in Section 2.6.1. The participants and I would regularly find connections over the similarities and differences as we talked, each recounting moments and experiences. There were many deep and rich narratives shared, often triggered by one another's stories.

The interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed verbatim by me. As per the participants' signed consent forms, they were offered the completed transcripts of their interviews for review, with the opportunity to add any additional detail, clarification, or information, if desired. The opportunity for the participants to withdraw from the study was also offered. The interview transcripts highlighted emerging themes and ideas that could be developed further, while placing importance on their voices and experiences as professional ballet dancers. After the participants had approved their transcripts, I drew key themes from the individual interviews and collated their core ideas (Kiger & Varpio, 2020), leading to the main topic areas described within the discussion chapter.

2.6 Position as Researcher

This section attends to the complexities of my position as researcher, and the subjectivity and reflexivity of being situated as such. Subjectivity and reflexivity are important to address as they affect the research by allowing the researcher to view their experiences alongside the participants', and to respond (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). They also bring to light some ethical considerations and limitations amongst the research, which are discussed in more detail in following sections.

2.6.1 Background and Current Position as Researcher

I performed and worked with two European professional ballet companies in my performing career as a dancer. In both environments I regularly had opportunities to work with choreographers commissioned to make new work within the contemporary ballet realm. Throughout this time, I experienced a range of creative choreographic processes which varied depending on how each choreographer facilitated the rehearsal space. This also allowed me to experience different levels of collaboration and agency, dependent on the choreographer and their process. I had opportunities to

form closer relationships with some choreographers when the cohort of dancers being used was smaller, and vice versa, having relationships I considered less personal when I was part of a bigger group. However, in relation to this research, as I transition away from performing, I am aware of the impact choreographic relationships can have on a ballet dancer's creative confidence. Now, when I facilitate my own choreographic processes, I consciously allow my past experiences as a dancer to guide the creative approach to collaboration with the dancers involved in any given composition.

I am a postgraduate dance studies researcher working in Aotearoa New Zealand as a teacher, choreographer, and creative producer. Further, being situated in a rich bicultural and multicultural environment within Aotearoa New Zealand (Simon-Kumar, 2019) has implications for the way I make choreography, and potentially how people might engage with the work. The participants' experiences of ballet, and my own, are situated within the Western concert dance (Lakes, 2005) lineage, brought together in the wider context of having experienced professional ballet dance in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.6.2 Insider-Outsider as the Researcher

My position as a researcher can be considered intimate (Taylor, 2011) in the context of dancing professionally in ballet, and then further defined as 'insider-outsider' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I am an insider because I am an experienced ballet dancer. However, I am also an outsider because I have not danced with the same companies as my interviewees; nor have I worked within a contemporary ballet context in Aotearoa New Zealand. Being an insider-outsider is an important viewpoint within this research because many of the participants' narratives are deeply personal. Standing as an insider-outsider allowed me to receive their stories empathically with understanding derived from similar moments in my own lived experiences.

My personal experience and knowledge within the field may affect my understanding of the participants' experiences, as any personal bias, beliefs and practices have their own forms (Johnson & Duberley, 2003). It seems of value to acknowledge the difference between insider-outsider positioning and a purely outsider perspective which can potentially provide a more objective view and identification of typical behaviours or themes (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Outsiders may read less into what the participants say, as they possess less intricate knowledge, opinions, and views on specific matters (Clifford, 1978; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Insider knowledge may be considered advantageous for data interpretation and analysis, as the researcher is potentially able to pick up on nuances in participant narratives.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

This research process included intimate personal information and relied on human participation. Therefore, ethical considerations required systems to be put in place to minimise the potential for any harm to participants. Ethics approval was granted by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC Reference 23260). Particular attention was also paid to the cultural backgrounds and ethnicities of the participants during the introductory interview questions so that I could understand how this may have impacted their engagement with any choreographic works discussed.

Firstly, consideration was given to a possible conflict of interest. My supervisor, Sarah Foster-Sproull is a contemporary choreographer in Aotearoa New Zealand and has a relationship with the Royal New Zealand Ballet. Some participants have worked with her in a professional capacity. This was identified for participants, as we discussed that Sarah was my supervisor and would read my work. Through the supervision process, Sarah and I strategised that any reference to her choreographic process would be avoided because of the conflict of interest. This was also addressed in the ethics application approved for this research.

In relation to dancers sharing their experiences of choreographic creativity, specifically regarding psychological harm, consideration was given to the risk of resurfacing potential past trauma. I was unsure whether speaking about specific choreographic experiences would allow positive or negative narratives to surface. To address the potential of resurfacing trauma, which may often be suppressed (Denscombe, 2007; Stein, et al., 2000) I provided topic overviews, a list of sample questions and a consent form for our interview in advance. Participants were encouraged to contemplate what may arise, and prepare accordingly (Welsh, 1999). I also made sure each participant knew they had a right to withdraw at any stage of the interview process.

Another ethical consideration within this research was naming the dancers, as was naming the companies they worked for. For the dancers, it felt vital to place strong, dancer-centred voices at the forefront of this research, therefore pushing against notions that a quiet dancer is a 'preferred' dancer (Claid, 2006). However, attending to any concerns about sharing challenging stories, the participants were made aware that up to one month after receiving the transcript they might edit their transcript in any way so they felt it best represented them. This provided ample time for the participants to review the transcripts. Further, as there are a limited number of ballet companies in Aotearoa New Zealand (Dance Aotearoa New Zealand, 2023), all names and identifying details of these companies have been removed to provide anonymity. Regarding third-party identification of companies and choreographers the participants had worked with, I identified that in the event I knew the people they discussed, I

would create pseudonyms to conceal the third parties' and to protect potential reputational harm. This was done so that the participants and I might have the most open conversations possible.

2.8 Process of Analysis

Following the interviews, a process of thematic analysis involving examining the literature review and interview transcripts with an interpretive lens was undertaken to locate themes throughout the data. To best understand and assess the participants' experiences, I related them to my own. This provided insightful interpretations of the dancer's narratives (Green & Stinson, 1999). I also chose to approach the analysis with a holistic view of the dancer, which is a key element in locating dancer-centredness (Knox, 2013; 2018). Keeping a holistic perspective and understanding at the forefront aligned with my approach to facilitating the interviews with my participants for this research.

2.8.1 Analysis through Grounded Theory

Just as the research process was conducted using a grounded theory approach, the analysis was conducted through the same lens. Some criteria for grounded theory methods carry over between both data collection and analysis, however, it feels vital to identify the different key facets. Within analysis, grounded theory is an inductive approach to research that aims to develop theories from the data, rather than existing theories (Strauss & Corbin 1994), which, according to Charmaz (2014), involves a systematic process of collecting then analysing data, to develop concepts and theories that are grounded within the data itself. Grounded theory can generate rich and detailed theories that are based in empirical data (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin 1994), and this was the reason for eliciting personal experiences and narratives from the participants in this study.

The grounded theory analysis (see Section 2.4) of the interview data uncovered themes of trust, judgement, vulnerability, and motivation in relation to creative confidence. I had considered these areas as potential points of discussion and throughout the course of data-gathering such noteworthy information became more prominent. Grounded theory also allowed the analysis of the data to be flexible and interpretive, uncovering deep connections between the key themes and creative confidence. The analysis of the research was undertaken through a dancer-centred lens (Baron, 2020; Foster-Sproull, 2017; Knox, 2013) in response to the ethnographic nature of the study. Through the interviews, transcription, and review of the material I identified multiple emerging themes important to the participants within their experiences as ballet dancers of choreographic relationships and creative confidence. The analysis built upon the original key themes of trust, judgement, vulnerability, and motivation, and distinguished them within the following contexts: confidence through emotional security, confidence in didactic and democratic environments, creative confidence as an optimal experience, and the challenge-skill balance enhancing creative confidence. All themes are unpacked in Sections 4.1 and 4.2.

2.8.2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that allows researchers to explore and analyse patterns and meanings in data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Braun and Clarke (2006) describe it as a "flexible method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns" (p. 79). The process of thematic analysis can involve multiple stages of categorising and identifying themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Researchers may immerse themselves in the data, and gradually refine concepts through an iterative process of reviewing the data and grouping them into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important to acknowledge that a researcher's personal interpretations can influence the analysis (Nowell et al., 2017).

Within this research, thematic analysis was used to examine the primary information sources, including the material presented in the literature review and the interview transcripts. The process endeavours to look for patterns in the interviewees' data, to then arrange the topics into main themes and concepts which become the research findings (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). In conducting thematic analysis, I drew upon emerging themes that appeared to be of importance to the interviewees and to this research (Braun & Clarke, 2019), connecting and condensing the information.

My past professional experience as a dancer assisted my analysis of participant experiences as I have domain-specific knowledge of the creative process from the dancer-centred perspective. I drew upon Knox's (2013) dancer-centred paradigm which was created based on person-centred literature (Rogers, 1969, 1977, 2000) from the disciplines of psychology, education, and management, and Knox's own dance experiences and knowledge of dance-making. Through Green's (2004) lens I drew upon Foucault's (1975/1995) notions of power to assess the themes of collaboration, relationship, trust, and respect within the participant's experiences of choreographic processes. I assessed all themes in relation to creative confidence (Kelley & Kelley, 2012), while contemplating my own experiences. This interpretive, thematic grounded theory analysis approach is the paradigm I continued to investigate through the exploration and discussion of the data findings (Chapter 4.1), continuing to draw connections between the literature review, which provided context to situate the research, and the interviews, which provided scope through the lived experiences of the participants.

2.9 Limitations of the Research

This research was limited by factors such as time and scope, and the small number of participants. A deliberate and distinctive limitation of this study was that all participants had to have danced professionally within Aotearoa New Zealand. Although having only five participants allowed for a very in-depth investigation into these participants' experiences, it also meant that the diversity of answers shared captured the experiences of only five individuals, rather than the variety of perspectives which may have resulted if more participants were involved. However, a diverse range of

moments, memories, and narratives was still amassed through the detailed one-on-one interviews. A further limitation was the timeframe and word count of this master's thesis. A channelling of research ideas and emergent data was needed to maintain a clear articulation of the participants' experiences and the findings of the study.

The research was conducted in 2021 which created inevitable complications due to COVID-19. This may have changed or affected dancer experiences choreographically as the arts world shifted to digital platforms (Heyang, & Martin, 2021). This is not to imply that research in the COVID-19 choreographic context is invalid, but more to acknowledge that experiences and interpretations of processes during this period may have unfolded differently. Another consideration was how audiences might now engage with art (Mak et al., 2021). However, the COVID-19 context could provide insight into potential future evolutions of choreographic processes as we continue to navigate such complications.

Finally, being an insider-outsider, may be considered advantageous in understanding participant perspectives on experiences similar to mine of choreographic processes. However, my experiences may also have impact how I interpreted information when analysing the participant interviews. I acknowledge that my lived experiences are present in my analysis of research materials and exist as a key part of my insider-outsider position, because the researcher cannot be removed from the research (Taylor, 2011).

Chapter 3: Literature Review—The Road Toward Ballet-Dancer-Centred Creative Confidence

This literature review section proposes a new term, Ballet-Dancer-Centred Creative Confidence (BDCCC), within choreographic practice. Building toward and contextualising this proposition prior to the discussion and the concluding chapters of this thesis, this literature review chapter investigates current ballet research to understand the experiences of professional ballet dancers working in a studio (Kelman, 2000; Kim et al., 2022) and draws upon the dancer-centred paradigm within contemporary dance (Knox, 2013; Foster-Sproull, 2017) to locate ballet-dancer-centredness and creative confidence.

To understand creative confidence in ballet dancers, this literature review investigates the creative elements of choreographic practice and process (Barbour, 2008; Brown, 1994; Foster-Sproull, 2017), confidence theory (Bandura, 2001; Maslow, 1979; Möbius et al., 2022), and applies research surrounding creative confidence (Kelley & Kelley, 2012; Nordin-Bates, 2020) to ballet dancers. Choreographic processes and creative confidence are connected through unpacking flow state and optimal experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014), which aids in contextualising the relationships between ballet dancers and choreographers.

This chapter seeks to acknowledge, understand, and then disentangle the historic power structures and hierarchies in professional ballet dancing (Homans, 2013; Wainwright et al, 2006), and reposition dancers as equally important as choreographers within the choreographic process.

3.1 Dancer-Centred Relationships Within the Choreographic Process

Studies by Knox (2013), Foster-Sproull (2017) and Baron (2020) provided the base for dancer-centred research situated in contemporary dance, which has been recontextualised into the professional ballet dancing domain in this thesis through work by scholars Turner and Wainwright, (2006), Homans (2013), and Clements and Nordin-Bates (2022). The ensuing sections describe in-depth meanings and understandings of dancer-centredness within the frame of this research, looking specifically at the relational elements of choreographic processes (Foster-Sproull, 2017) such as collaboration (Knox, 2013), and the potential for dancer-centred choreographic facilitation within ballet.

3.1.1 What is a Dancer-Centred Relationship?

Dancer-centred facilitation of choreographic processes is focused toward self-actualisation, decision-making, agency, and new approaches to hierarchical power structures by the dancers (Knox, 2013). When interacting in a dancer-choreographer relationship, a choreographer considers the needs of the dancers within their process, which can involve varying levels of collaboration (Knox, 2018). Therefore, a dancer-centred relationship will encompass individuals' self-understanding and self-exploration, and may challenge authoritarian approaches to managing people (Rogers, 2000), impacting hierarchical relationship. Dancer-choreographer interactions may focus on offering the

dancer "holistic decision-making" (Knox, 2013, p. 3), holistic treatment, and opportunities to contribute to choreographic processes (Foster-Sproull, 2017), and provide the option to deconstruct hierarchies through dynamic interactions, potentially leading to an experience of self-actualisation within the dance making process.

Focused within the contemporary dance rehearsal environment, Baron (2020) has reconceptualised rehearsal direction processes through a holistic dancer-centred lens to place the dancer at the heart of the rehearsal process. The four core elements of self-actualisation, wellbeing, belonging, and self-esteem in Baron's (2020) research provide further insight into dancer-centredness. Baron's (2020) research has uncovered the profound impact rehearsal directors can have on dancers' expression and fulfilment of needs in the rehearsal, proposing that by disentangling power structures and hierarchies and fostering democratic environments through horizontal working relationships directors may provide dancers with opportunities to experience agency, self-actualisation, sustained wellbeing, and a sense of belonging, leading to greater self-esteem (Baron, 2020).

The hierarchy in which artistic directors and company staff rank professional dancers creates power dynamics within the studio (Harrison, 2021). Baron's (2020) research is relevant to ballet because of the power dynamics inherent in companies created by ranking dancers from corps de ballet to principal dancers, casting processes, competitiveness, power imbalances, and deference to the authority of teachers, coaches, directors, and choreographers; and the expectation and valuing of silencing physical and emotional pain (Pickard & Risner, 2020). From a choreographic perspective, dancer-centred choreographic practice may facilitate a creative process where the dancer's whole being can be respected and appreciated, physically, intellectually, and emotionally (Knox, 2013). Being perceived holistically can provide a more inclusive, comprehensive experience for the dancer (Baron, 2020, Knox, 2013), and by utilising collaborative choreographic processes may aid in providing a more holistic experience where dancers can act more autonomously (Clements, 2022). The following section further contextualises collaboration within creative processes.

3.1.2 Choreographic Processes and Collaboration

There is limited research locating collaboration within a professional ballet environment. However, Alterowitz (2014) provides a feminist perspective on collaboration within a ballet school studio setting which may also be applied to a professional ballet environment. Alterowitz (2014) writes of pedagogy which disestablishes hierarchy within the relationships between dancers and their teachers, directors, and choreographers, and argues that this can allow for collaborative working methods. Her research explores the development of a democratic ballet pedagogy that transforms the ballet studio into an environment which engages individual participants' learning styles and life experiences, and encourages experimentation and collaboration (Alterowitz, 2014).

Collaboration in a democratic environment may see the choreographer considering each individual and what they have to offer (Barbour, 2008). For dancers, working collaboratively within a democratic environment may mean they feel more cared for within the work, if a choreographer does consider each person individually, which links back to Barbour's (2008) emphasis on the importance of considering social and personal needs within dance-making. However, choreographic processes are often on a fast-paced timeline (Clements & Nordin-Bates, 2022) to complete the work, so the choreographer should not be expected to always facilitate a space congruent to everyone's individual needs, but rather to acknowledge them in a way that may best suit their creative process.

Barbour (2008) discusses collaboration as, "the acts and processes of two or more people working together to create or achieve the same thing" (p. 44). Further situating collaboration within contemporary dance, Knox (2013) refers to this "working together" as "creative relationships" (p. 44). Therefore, creative collaboration may be understood as the coming together of two or more people in a relationship in which ideas are generated and actions undertaken to achieve a common goal. Locating creative collaboration within dance may be attained by first understanding choreographic processes in which dancer agency, action, and decision-making can be present in choreographic facilitation (Barbour, 2008). Collaborative processes may create expectations or opportunities for engagement between dancer and choreographer throughout different stages of creating a choreographic work, possibly impacting the amount of agentic action available to dancers.

Butterworth's (2004) didactic-to-democratic spectrum expertly contextualises relational possibilities between dancer and choreographer in which the choreographer may take on leadership roles such as "pilot" (p. 58), "facilitator" (p. 60), or "collaborator" (p. 62). Didactic and democratic approaches may allow the dancers varying degrees of contribution through to "co-owner" (p. 62) of the work; this being the most democratic relationship. Similarly to Butterworth (2004), Newall and Fortin (2012) also offer possible roles that dancers may fulfil within choreographic processes. These authors suggest that the four roles of "executant," "interpreter," "participant," and "improviser" (p. 195) are fluid and that dancers may perform any or all of these within a choreographic process.

Within the dance-making phase of movement generation there is the opportunity to learn through doing, to test skills, and to increase abilities (Mainwaring & Krasnow, 2010; Seaman, 2006), which Foster-Sproull (2017) proposes can result in the experience of a more aware, empowered, self-initiated, and agentic process for the dancer. Foster-Sproull's (2017) research suggests a repositioning of the choreographer as a service provider, with the dancer capable of occupying, or consuming the experience, which, in conjunction with Butterworth's (2004) didactic-to-democratic process continuum model, led to the production of the prosumer-dancer paradigm (PDP) and the prosumer-dancer activations of choreographic technique or PACT (Foster-Sproull, 2023). The PACT (Foster-

Sproull, 2023) is a comprehensive scale which situates person-centred and dancer-centred theory within economic theories of prosumption (Toffler, 1981; 2022).

Choreographing works in contemporary dance companies often involves collaboration throughout the creative process (Petrides et al., 2006; Stevens & Leach, 2015;), and ample opportunity for dancer agency can occur, in varying degrees of contribution (Butterworth, 2004). One way of working to undertake collaborative processes in contemporary dance-making is through an activity called 'tasking'. Tasking can be understood as choreographic exercises where "the choreographer invites dancers to respond and create material around propositions" (Foster-Sproull, 2017, p. 25). These might be in the form of questions, problems or concepts provided by the choreographer to engage the dancer in constructing their own dance movement (Butterworth, 2004; Roche, 2011). Foster-Sproull (2017) writes of this as involving the whole dancer, referring to Knox's (2013) definition of this as "intellectual, emotional and psychological engagement" (p. 31). In tasking, the choreographer may manipulate and detail the material created by the dancer to mould it into a choreographic work (Butterworth, 2004). The dancer can make decisions, create intention, facilitate actions, and contribute intellectually to the process (Knox, 2013).

Locating collaborative choreographic methods within a ballet company environment can provide a contrasting view. Roche (2011) suggests the collaborative process of dance-making within contemporary dance can be made possible under the direction of the choreographer with their facilitation of tasks. The roles of choreographer and dancer within this process might be considered by some as more equal within contemporary dance settings than within ballet. Butterworth (2004) has highlighted that a choreographer's role can be to create, imagine or connect dance movements, and a dancer's role can be to technically execute and perform those movements, embodying the choreographer's ideas. Situating dancer-choreographer roles within ballet using Butterworth's (2004) didactic-to-democratic scale, can provide clarity as to what may be expected for both dancers and choreographers during a creative process. Newall and Fortin (2012) have explained that collaborative dance-making processes are not bound by particular rules, rather, they are fluid. Further, they have suggested that, within collaborative choreographic processes, the variations in the hierarchical relationship between choreographer and dancer might affect the dancer's "autonomy, subjectivity and identity" (p. 195).

Knox (2013) has discussed multiple avenues to collaboration in dance-making, suggesting that towards the more democratic end of the scale, the dancer may be acknowledged as working interactively and responsively with, rather than for, the choreographer to create the work. Aligning choreographic process theories (Butterworth, 2004; Foster-Sproull, 2017) and contemporary choreographic practice (Newall & Fortin, 2012), I considered Knox's (2013) view of the holistic

dancer and how a consistent, coordinated, goal-directed approach to activity and agency might affect how collaboration appears, particularly within ballet. It may be valid to question how various moments of these different relationships might promote or inhibit a ballet dancer's creative contributions.

3.1.3 Agency and Autonomy: Dancer-Centredness in a Professional Ballet Environment

Ballet-dancer confidence can involve two key factors within a creative process: artistic autonomy (Buss & Westlund, 2002; Deci & Ryan, 1995; Noice & Noice, 2006) and agency (Barbour et al., 2016; Elder-Vass, 2010; Knox, 2013). The terms 'artistic autonomy' and 'agency' can be differentiated by considering artistic autonomy as an adage of style and agency as decision-making in choreographic steps. Foster-Sproull (2017) has proposed that experience is optimised when agency and autonomy extend across many facets of the production process. The following section differentiates artistic autonomy and agency and situates them within dancer-centredness in a professional ballet environment.

Choreographic hierarchy can impact dancer's feelings of agency and autonomy within the creative process (Petrides et al., 2006). For example, Newall and Fortin (2012) suggest variations in a hierarchical relationship between choreographer and dancer might affect the dancer's "autonomy, subjectivity and identity" (p. 195) and inhibit a dancer's creative contributions. In contrast, Kolb and Kalogeropoulou (2012) contend that any form of dancer agency is denied within ballet due to the strict rules, technical and artistic expectations, and the inherent power held by the directorship in ballet companies. However, if artistic autonomy is considered separate from agency, having artistic autonomy may provide a sense of agency. Artistic autonomy can be explored through dancers' meanings of agency within choreographic practice, particularly where the decision-making opportunities can be provided through agency (Knox, 2013; Barbour, 2008). Providing a dancer with creative choice can manufacture significance and time for meaning making within the process and may also be viewed as a deeper investment by the dancer (Knox, 2013). Artistic autonomy within this research can be viewed as an aesthetic authorship, which is the individual style a dancer may apply to prescribed choreographic steps. Some ballet companies are known for a particular style or artistic form (Royce, 2004; Morris, 2008). This can be particularly observed when watching dancers performing within the corps de ballet, or as a group, where they may be expected to prioritise the group's precision over the individual's, creating synchronicity for the company as a whole (Turner & Wainwright, 2003). Wainwright et al. (2006) suggest that creative agency and artistic autonomy within traditional classical ballet repertoire may be more challenging to achieve if there are less opportunities for individual artistic style. This is because traditional ballet repertoire often upholds the foundational steps and expressions of the original choreography (Kelman, 2000; Kim et al, 2022;).

For example, there may be pre-defined expectations within a ballet's storyline or for the emotion of a dancer in the performance of a particular role (Homans, 2013; Wulff, 2008).

Although outside the scope of this research, the ballet industry has upheld specific styles, content, and the ethos of traditional classical ballet works through historically derived practices (Farrugia-Kriel & Jensen, 2020; Homans, 2013). However, if ballet dancers were encouraged to be more autonomous, this could lead to ballet dancers having more confidence to explore beyond historical styles and expectations, which, within person-centred theory, looks like "an individual aiming towards fulfilment, growth and independence" (Rogers, 1980, p. 119). Self-actualisation, artistic autonomy and meaning making rely on these components to exist (Knox, 2013). Within dancer-centred practices, dancers may be enabled to contribute to creative processes more effectively. This might suggest that if a more autonomous and dancer-centred approach to ballet were undertaken, it could champion "openness, growth, and change" (Gatongi, 2007, p. 205).

3.2 Creativity and Confidence in Ballet

This section explores the literature that situates creativity within the context of professional dancers' experiences of choreographic processes. An overview of creativity (Amabile, 1988) within social psychology (Bandura, 2001; Rogers, 1961) is presented to provide scope, which is then located within a wider dance context in choreographic processes, and how creativity may appear specifically within ballet is discussed. Finally, understandings of creativity within dance are connected to dancers' experiences of confidence and self-esteem (Maslow, 1943) within creative environments.

3.2.1 Understanding Creativity

Creativity has been defined by Amabile and Pillemer (2012) as behaviours original and suitable in a particular context. Woodman & Schoenfeld (1989) considered creativity as new ideas viewed for their value to culture and society. According to Clements and Nordin-Bates (2022), creativity in ballet can be important on a broad scale in such processes as new choreographies, cocreating via improvisation, and taking on a creative approach to a role.

To contextualise creativity and make use of creative and critical thinking means to consider the people, processes, product, and environment in which we are engaging in creative thought (Cosgrave, 2019; de Sousa, 2008). A creative person may be seen as someone who makes or thinks something creative through a process or product-oriented definition. For example,

> …a product or response is creative to the extent that appropriate observers
> independently agree it is creative... and it can also be regarded as the process by
> which something so judged is produced (Amabile, 2012, p. 31).

Amabile's (2012) statement suggests that a person's response to an idea could be considered as a creative contribution, just as idea generation is. Within a choreographic environment, Amabile's (2012) theory may present itself as a choreographer prompting or triggering a dancer with an idea and expecting a counter response in return from the dancer (Section 3.2.2). Further, regarding the process and product in creativity, Stein (1984) has described creativity as a process that results in novelty which is accepted as useful, and is satisfying to a significant group of people, stressing its objectivity. However, some literature counters that creativity is more of a subjective pursuit because it is based on people's perceptions (Feldman et al., 1994; Plucker, 2005) and requires judgement to decide if an idea is original (Richards, 2007). Regardless of creativity being subjective or objective, Gaut (2010) has described creativity as the capacity to produce original and valuable ideas or products. Within the context of this research, creativity might be perceived in how a dancer engages with a choreographic process and how this may impact their perspectives of their own creative ability.

Bettencourt's (2014) analysis of Carl Rogers (1954) and Mihaly Csíkszentmihályi's (1996) theories on creativity and creative transformation provides further context which can be applied to dance. Rogers' (1954; 1961; 2000) notions of creativity are grounded within positive psychology and person-centred theory. Csíkszentmihály's (1990; 1996; 2014) research on creativity explored flow state, and conditions deemed necessary to achieve it. Bettencourt (2014) has highlighted a significant overlap between Rogers' (2000) and Csíkszentmihályi's (2014) theories, as both saw creativity as resulting from an individual's relationships, and not occurring solely within the individual. Within dance, particularly choreographic practice, creativity might be thought of as an individual process which can also be utilised within a collective.

Nicholas Rowe and David Zeitner-Smith (2011) have acknowledged that individual experiences of creative partnership with a choreographer may include opportunities for dancers to engage with the "physical, conceptual and logistical ideas" (p. 41) of a dance-work. Their research can be linked to Amabile's (1988, 2012) proposal that creativity peaks in the contemporary art-making process when it involves a person's experience and inspiration, within a workplace that encourages creativity to emerge. In attending to the social aspect of the choreographic relationship, attention may also be drawn to the "relations of production" (Gardner, 2011, p. 152) between dancer and choreographer. Therefore, if creativity can be impacted by environments (Csíkszentmihályi & Sawyer, 1995), and ballet technique is codified (Hopper et al., 2018; Morris, 2003), this could impact creativity levels and encourage ballet-dancer conformity of body and mind (Warren, 1989), which may be considered by some as opposing creativity.

3.2.2 Confidence and Dancer Self-Esteem in Choreographic Environments

When dancers are encouraged to contribute their creative expression to a choreographic process, they may experience feelings of personal satisfaction (Foster-Sproull, 2017). Encouraging dancer satisfaction within the creative process may create fulfilling experiences and possibly shift a dancer's self-perspective and self-esteem. For dancers, application of creative skills can aid confidence, while confidence, in turn, may strengthen the application of their creative skills (Amabile & Pillemer, 2012).

The following section differentiates three general terms which often overlap yet hold separate meanings: self-esteem; self-confidence; and self-efficacy (Möbius et al., 2022). Self-esteem develops as a result of life experiences and interactions with other people and can be measured by the amount a person appreciates and values themselves (Coudevylle et al., 2011). Self-confidence refers to the belief a person has in their abilities, and can change, depending on a situation or environment (Deci & Ryan, 1995; 2012). Some theorists argue that to have self-confidence, you must have a certain amount of self-esteem (Branden, 1990; 2021), which is relevant to ballet because it may mean that if a dancer is faced with a challenge in a choreographic environment, they could better manage their confidence to tackle the task. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to execute and produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1997, 2006).

Within this research, self-confidence and self-esteem are the vital themes, with self-efficacy being less prominent, and the following paragraph provides explanation surrounding this choice. Self-esteem refers to the realistic respect and self-belief an individual holds, regardless of their actual ability to perform a task (Greene & Burke, 2007; Maslow, 1943). It has been acknowledged within social psychological research that it is possible to have low self-esteem, yet high self-efficacy, and vice-versa (Iancu et al., 2015). Within the specific context of this research, self-esteem is the prominent term because of the correlation identified between self-confidence and self-esteem (Branden, 2021) which is relevant to determining dancers' confidence levels. Self-esteem can be viewed as a person's overall evaluation of themselves, both within and outside of a professional ballet environment.

Contemplating how a dancer's past experiences of creative choreographic processes may unfold into new choreographic experiences, I considered how this may impact their self-esteem, and their decisions to engage in choreographic practices that are on a spectrum between facilitative and didactic (Butterworth, 2004). From a qualitative research perspective, it seems valuable to acknowledge that needs can vary extensively for each individual. Researching creative fulfilment led me to contemplate dancers' self-esteem needs (Maslow, 1943) within a choreographic process, and what might positively impact their sense of self-confidence and overall confidence levels, and their self-esteem.

There is limited research on creative fulfilment within ballet dancing, however, in discussing contemporary dance, Knox (2013) has noted that various emotional experiences or interactions can impact on a dancer's self-esteem and creative engagement. However, Knox (2013) has also acknowledged that collaborative dance-making may present possibilities for a dancer to experience empowerment and develop self-confidence and self-determination alongside personal and artistic growth (Barbour 2008; Barbour et al., 2016). Barbour (2008) has identified that both social and personal needs should be considered within dance-making. It may be that, through a choreographer attending to the social and personal needs of dancers, a more nuanced facilitation of the choreographic process can occur, and a sense of creative fulfilment can be evoked for dancers', thus encouraging their self-esteem. Baron (2020) proposes that aligning dancers' needs with achieving choreographic goals can increase dancer's self-confidence. Using Rogers' (1961) person-centred theory within dance (Knox, 2013), to link confidence and self-esteem, this may also look like actively listening and taking into consideration thoughts and opinions, in an attempt to understand and fulfil a dancer's needs.

Although within this research self-esteem, rather than self-efficacy, is at the forefront of the participants experiences, for further contextualisation of confidence theory, Bandura's (1982; 1986, 1990) self-efficacy theory is relevant to understanding self-confidence. According to Bandura (1986, 1990), high levels of self-confidence in a person lead them to attribute failure to a lack of effort. Whereas low self-confidence in a person often sees failure attributed to lack of ability (Collins, 1982; Möbius et al., 2022). Therefore, if a dancer perceives their success to be attributed to their ability, rather than luck, their sense of self-confidence and self-esteem may be enhanced. A higher sense of confidence in dancers may be aided or diminished by a choreographer's interactions and transactions with dancers (Roche, 2011), and may suggest that, regardless of whether a dancer enjoys choreographic processes or not, they can still feel confident within their abilities to deliver what a choreographer is asking of them. Within the dancer-centred (Knox, 2013) context of this research, a choreographer may guide and direct creative decision-making when involving dancers, which can further foster a dancer's sense of self-confidence and impact levels of self-esteem. How a choreographer facilitates such guidance or direction is worth considering within the hierarchical gaze (Green, 2004; Rowe et al., 2015) their position provides, and how this may affect ballet dancers creatively.

3.2.3 The Impacts of Power on Creativity and Confidence in a Professional Ballet Environment

Ballet companies may be considered competitive, and critical environments (Morris, 2008), in which power hierarchies can impact dancers' confidence and desire to contribute creatively (Clements & Nordin-Bates, 2022). This section outlines how hierarchical structures in ballet companies may affect feelings of trust within relationships involving power (Gardner, 2007; Green, 2003) and surveillance and judgement (Foucault, 1995). Trust in relation to power, choreographic hierarchies, and bodily

surveillance, is essential to understanding my participants' experiences, as they have each experienced a diverse range of choreographic encounters. Understanding power-based relationships can also contextualise the participants' experiences of confidence and creativity during choreographic processes. The following section highlights trust within choreographic environments, with particular attention paid to the relationships and interactions between dancers and choreographers within ballet (Kelman, 2000, Kim et al., 2022;). Trust is a key component in locating BDCCC within this research.

Surveillance within frameworks of power led me to look at trust in relation to knowledge and power through Foucault's (1995) notion of the 'docile body', which Green (2003) extends in relation to dance. I was drawn to these scholars because surveillance can be viewed through a physical and spatial lens, involving processes of watching over subjects. For example, Gardner (2007) has argued that choreographers are inherently situated within hierarchy and dancers often adhere, which could be considered as a possessive use of power. However, Foucault's (Faubion, 2002) perspective on power, focuses on how people relate and interact with others, meaning that power dynamics within these relationships can be fluid, dependent on the environment, and non-possessive. Perhaps there is value in Gardner's (2007) concept that dancers traditionally adhere, although Foucault's (1995, 2002) theory would suggest that the relationship is more complex. There may be implied authority within dancer-choreographer relationships, where a choreographer's perspective is a result of their "hierarchical gaze" (Green, 2004, p. 40), which could be seen as a possessive form of power, however this may not be inherent within every dancer-choreographer relationship.

Butterworth's (2004) didactic-to-democratic dance-making spectrum identifies that within some choreographic processes the dancer may be regarded as an 'instrument', replicating movements designed by the choreographer. This prompted thought on dancers' compliance with and trust in choreographic direction (Clements & Nordin-Bates, 2022) and made me question whether sometimes dancers' compliance might be assumed. By repositioning a dancer as a consumer of a choreographic process within the microeconomy of dance-making, Foster-Sproull (2023) views the approach of dancers accepting choreographic direction as being that of an "informed consumer" (p. 52), noting that a dancer's voice and unique ways of moving are potentially limited when they are positioned as such. In relation to the choreography of new ballet, I wondered whether a choreographer's power might negate dancer-choreographer trust built within choreographic or creative relationships, which is important, as a lack of trust could make dancers feel less confident in their creative environments.

Discussing relationship hierarchies within dancer-centred theory hierarchies, Knox (2013) has suggested that "power within choreographic relationship is perceived as being inherent" (p. 72) because a choreographer often undertakes a leadership role. Ballet can cultivate relational hierarchy (Demerson, 2020; Turner & Wainwright, 2003), for example, during the creation of a new ballet,

which suggests that trust may not be considered as important if power is "inherent" (Knox, 2013, p. 72) in dynamic interactions between dancers and choreographers. Foucault (1995) has proposed that practicing interactions of trust can progress the level of relational power, which provokes thought as to whether this contributes to the docility of dancers within some ballet environments, particularly when participating in a choreographic process.

Choreography is viewed as a socially constructed experience (Barbour, 2008; Gardner, 2007, 2011; Risner, 2000), where the parameters of the environment may be designed and implemented by the dancers and choreographer (Foster-Sproull, 2017). This may be seen to promote methods of surveillance, judgement, and power within the choreographic environment due to the hierarchical nature of choreographic processes, which can involve the evaluation or assessment of material during movement generation (Dryburgh & Fortin, 2010; Fortin et al., 2009; Green, 2003; Knox, 2013). A democratic environment in a rehearsal context may allow dancers to maintain a stable sense of self-esteem that is less reliant on external surveillance through dancers trusting their own opinions and knowledge (Baron, 2020; Richards & Gardner, 2019). However, maintaining democratic facilitation can be challenging within the pressure of choreographic timeframes, and may lack conceptual direction if a choreographer is attempting to incorporate every dancer's ideas (Butterworth, 2004).

Rowe et al.'s (2020) research contemplated three Foucauldian forms of surveillance within a dance education environment: hierarchical supervision of everyone within an environment, clearly defined standards that seek to enforce uniform behaviours amongst peers, and processes of self-examination that can reinforce behavioural standards. Their research aided in identifying three potential processes of surveillance in relation to professional ballet dancing: hierarchical surveillance—by the people that employ you within the structures of the institution or company (Foucault, 1995); peer surveillance—methods of judgment between dancers of equal or different rank (Trottier, 2020); and self-surveillance—the perception of self, perfectionism, and criticism of your own capabilities (Lyon, 2007).

Considering whether extrinsic forms of surveillance may infringe on an artist's aspirations to explore creativity more intrinsically, Dance Scholar Rosemary Martin (2008) has clarified that both knowledge and power hold jurisdiction over 'what' and 'how' we know something (Hall & Hill, 2012). Looking at a choreographic context through a Foucauldian lens (1995), Martin's (2008) perspective may position a ballet dancer as subordinate to a choreographer because the dance-making environment may privilege the choreographer's knowledge over dancer's expertise. If the creative process of choreography is having movement first imagined by the choreographer and then performed by the dancers (Gardner, 2007), then potentially such an approach creates a hierarchical structure, because the choreography is being designed by one person rather than through a facilitative or

democratic choreographic process (Foster-Sproull, 2023). Democratic processes are important within this research because they allow dancers' voices to be heard (Knox, 2013), a key element in providing an environment for creatively confident ballet dancers.

Traditionally, dancers in some environments have been described as silent (Claid, 2006) and are expected to comply with the demands made of them with little recourse to questions (Butterworth, 2004). A typical scenario, as described by both Gardner (2011) and Green (1999), has the choreographer sitting with their back to the mirror watching their dancers rehearse or perform, creating an environment for surveillance to unfold (Foucault, 1995) and providing space for the choreographer to either approve of what they are seeing, or not. Pickard (2012) has noted that such scenarios encourage dancers to trust and adhere to the 'compliant' aspects of their role, hence the use of the term 'docile' (Foucault, 1995; Green, 2003), which is a quality that BDCCC can tolerate, as long as the expectation of dancer compliance is not abused by choreographers.

Referencing Butterworth's (2004) didactic-to-democratic scale and Newall & Fortin's (2012) discussions on collaborative scales in dance processes, it may be that different choreographic processes have potential for different amounts of power and agency within ballet (Clements & Nordin-Bates, 2022). Throughout this research I have sought to understand how a choreographer might facilitate a process that enables a dancer's creative autonomy and confidence to manifest whilst still managing choreographic time frames, and dancer-centred process satisfaction (Foster-Sproull, 2017; Lu et al., 2022). The answers may lie in providing dancers with a voice, agency, and autonomy within an industry that has diverse and potentially challenging choreographic practices.

3.3 Optimising Motivation, Flow, and Creativity in Choreographic Processes

Considering the previous section's findings on diverse and potentially challenging choreographic practices in professional ballet environments, the additions of investigations of flow state (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014) and optimal experience (Nakamura & Csíkszentmihályi, 2014), became relevant to this research as means of expanding thought on current creative processes. This section was initially built from my personal experiences as a ballet dancer, and my reflections on motivation, challenge, and extending my artistic and technical skills during varying choreographic processes, which are explored in the discussion chapter. In this section, I discuss the concepts of flow state (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014) and optimal experience (Nakamura & Csíkszentmihályi, 2014), and how these may provide opportunities for further creative engagement through developing and maintaining a challenge-skill balance (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014) in choreographic processes. To unpack flow state and optimal experience I discuss extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1980, 1995, 2012), locating both within choreographic practice. This provides the key foundation for looking at motivation from a ballet dancer's perspective, particularly utilising challenge-skill, which

contextualises what may push dancers' levels of engagement and creative confidence in choreographic processes.

3.3.1 Challenge-Skill Balance: Motivation as an Optimal Experience for Ballet Dancers

Csíkszentmihályi (1975) pioneered discussion of the challenge-skill balance, which can be defined as a balance struck between the challenge of the task and the skill of the performer, and focuses on the ideas of motivation, challenge, and overall success. Flow state is considered a key component of finding a challenge-skill balance, it cannot occur if the task is too easy or too difficult, as both skill level and challenge level must be matched and high (Csíkszentmihályi, 2021). Further, flow state is an intrinsically motivating state of consciousness characterised by simultaneous perception of high challenge and skill (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990). Therefore, if a dancer were to reach flow state during a choreographic process, this may physically or creatively motivate them. However, Fong et al. (2015) have argued that whether or not challenge-skill balance is the primary antecedent for achieving flow state is unclear, which could suggest flow state does not need to occur for people, including dancers, to be optimally motivated.

Connecting challenge-skill and motivation to confidence, Deci and Ryan (1995) have theorised that people are often motivated by the idea of growth within themselves and their pursuits, and gain fulfilment from accomplishing tasks, both big and small. Being challenged can be important for a dancer's sense of self-actualisation and growth (Baron, 2020), and therefore self-esteem (Maslow, 1943, 1979). Through a dancer-centred (Knox, 2013) lens, such findings suggest that when ballet dancers are challenged, technically and artistically throughout choreographic processes, a choreographer may also have more opportunities to encourage and motivate the dancers to grow by pushing them to their full potential, and a growth and motivation feedback loop may develop. Further, within a motivational environment (Deci & Ryan, 2012), a ballet dancer (Nordin-Bates, 2020) may also build their confidence level in creative spaces, leading to artistic and technical development.

3.3.2 Intrinsic and Extrinsic: Optimally Motivating Creative Experiences

Amabile (1983) has argued that an "intrinsically motivated state is conducive to creativity, whereas the extrinsically motivated state is detrimental" (p. 14). This may be important for some ballet dancers if they are expected to be intrinsically motivated in their work (Clements & Nordin-Bates, 2022). Intrinsic motivation arises from an individual's perception of the value of engaging in a task at hand, for example, finding it interesting, enjoyable, satisfying, or positively challenging (Amabile & Pillemer, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2012). While extrinsic motivation comes from outside sources, for example, promise of rewards or praise, the threat of failing to meet a deadline, or receiving a negative evaluation (Amabile & Pillemer, 2012). Within social psychology theory, extrinsic motivators in the social environment could change motivational states from intrinsic to extrinsic and, thus, undermine

creative behaviour (Amabile, 2012; Kruglanski et al., 1971). Understanding that potential switches in motivational states and an undermining of creative behaviour can sometimes occur, dependent on environments or interactions, is essential within this research, as some participants discussed how being externally motivated by choreographers can either trigger an internal sense of drive, which is required when engaging in a challenge-skill process, or alternately, this can take their feelings of intrinsic motivation away.

Intrinsic motivation, action, and awareness can be understood through the concept of self-direction. Within dance this might look like individuals engaging in "self-initiated action" (Motschnig-Pitrik & Mallich, 2004, p. 181). But, the traditional stereotype of a dancer, especially in classical ballet, is of a hard-working individual with little creative agency (Lakes 2005; Nordin-Bates, 2020, Pickard 2015). Considering both these perspectives suggests a conflict between the requirement for a ballet dancer to perform "self-initiated action" (Motschnig-Pitrik & Mallich, 2004, p. 181) but not creative agency, which, within the context of this research, could impact a dancer's ability to engage in challenge-skill scenarios confidently. This makes it worth considering what may occur when dancers are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated synchronously.

Motivation might be enhanced when dancers feel valued and respected in the development of new choreography (Knox, 2013). A choreographer can empower dancers to utilise their skills and knowledge as intelligent, highly motivated individuals, to find what is meaningful within a work to them (Knox, 2013). Choreographers could propose creative tasks or problems to be solved, that promote self-initiated action and therefore can "enable individuals to govern themselves" (Martin, 2008, p. 30). In an environment that fosters creative collaboration, choreographers can interact with dancers and facilitate a space where dancers can challenge themselves, and contribute meaningfully to the choreographic process.

Deci and Ryan (1980, 1995) explain that intrinsic motivation derives from the innate psychological needs for self-determination, whereas extrinsic motivation relies on rewards controlled by others (Deci & Ryan, 1980; 1995). Relating this to ballet, a dancer may be motivated by a choreographer's approval, which could either elevate or dismantle their sense of self-esteem (Twitchett et al., 2010). Compromised self-esteem can lead to a lack of dancer motivation (Chirban & Rowan, 2016). Amabile (1997) has identified "validation and communication" (p. 23) as essential parts of a creative process which includes consideration for the generation of ideas and how they are selected. This could suggest that if a ballet dancer does not receive validation from a choreographer, it may impact both their self-esteem and motivation levels.

Knox's (2013) research touched upon topics such as meeting high expectations as motivation for delivering quality performances. Baron (2020) has shed further light on how motivation in the rehearsal process can affect dancers' performance. Both scholars reference how motivation is associated with feeling valued, asserting agency, and being in a space which bolsters good self-esteem: all of which contribute to sustaining dancers' wellbeing. This approach enhances motivation, personal development and, as a consequence, performance (Baron, 2020), acknowledging that fluctuations in the rehearsal process may allow dancers to reach peak performance levels (Hopper et al., 2020), and recognise the interplay between motivation and self-esteem leading to such a progression.

Within a dance context, optimal experience might be considered as being when a dancer is performing at peak functionality. At a dancer's peak they may be in a state where they are being challenged enough to step outside their comfort zone but not too much so that they feel out of control (Baron, 2020). Based on Csíkszentmihályi's (2009) model, this is when optimal experiences may occur. From a dancer-centred perspective (Knox, 2013), Foster-Sproull (2017) has explained that "an optimal experience may centre on dance-making task complexity, clarity of ideas, time spent to construct and practice material, and the collegial atmosphere provided by the choreographer" (p. 41). Baron (2020) explains that being challenged is understood as important for dancers' sense of growth. This suggests that choreographically, this may be easier to achieve as the creative process can provide more moments for challenges through implementing tasks or providing provocations, through which dancers can be pushed and encouraged toward achieving a flow state.

3.4 Summary of the Literature Review

This literature review has explored the meanings and understandings of choreographic practice (Foster-Sproull, 2017), ballet-dancer-centredness (Clements & Nordin-Bates, 2022; Knox, 2013), power and hierarchy within professional ballet environments (Kim et al., 2022), creativity (Amabile, 2012), and creative confidence (Kelley & Kelley, 2013), aligning with flow state and optimal experience (Csikszentmihályi, 2014). The literature highlights the significance of communication in choreographic processes, and how this may enable dancers to contribute their unique perspectives and creativity to choreography (Nordin-Bates, 2020). The contemporary choreographic research referenced here suggests that choreographers can create safe and secure spaces where dancers can express themselves and engage in discussion without fear of retribution (Pickard, 2012).

This chapter has recognised the potentially challenging power dynamics within professional ballet environments, and that the hierarchical structure of ballet companies can lead to a lack of creative freedom, potentially stifling choreographic processes (Morris, 2008; Newall & Fortin, 2012; Wulff, 2008). It has also been acknowledged that dancers can be empowered to take active roles in creative

processes if choreographers can foster an environment of mutual respect and understanding (Butterworth, 2004; Clements & Nordin-Bates, 2022). Further, this chapter has identified the role of creative confidence (Kelley & Kelley, 2012) in facilitating optimal motivational experiences for ballet dancers, suggesting that when dancers are encouraged to take risks and contribute their perspectives to choreography, they may experience elements of flow state (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014), higher motivation levels, and optimal experience, resulting in more meaningful performances and higher confidence levels creatively, emotionally, and physically.

These key concepts and themes are highlighted in current scholarship on the complexities and potentials in the professional ballet dancer-choreographer relationship. This chapter has outlined the ballet-dancer-centred paradigm, identifying dynamic interactions which can occur within creative processes, and locating them within choreographic spaces, thus providing a context for how dancers are viewed and voiced within this research. These areas are examined further in the analysis and discussion chapter, within the frame of the participants' experiences.

Chapter 4: Discussion and Analysis—Activating The Dancers' Voices

This chapter analyses five participants' experiences of choreographic relationships (Section 4.1) and choreographic creative confidence (Section 4.2). It highlights the dancers' voices, placing them as equally important within creative processes as the choreographers'. Having explored meanings and understandings of dancer-centred relationships and choreographic practice within ballet (Section 3.2), this is investigated further through analysis and discussion in the ensuing chapter. By interpreting the participants' narratives in relation to creative relationships and confidence, this chapter seeks to deepen knowledge of Ballet-Dancer-Centred Creative Confidence.

4.1 "It Felt Electric": Ballet Dancers' Experiences of Choreographic Relationships

Trust, motivation, judgement, and vulnerability are the key themes analysed within this section of the discussion. Particularly, the ballet dancers' experiences of the choreographic relationship and creative confidence are analysed, and I situate the participants' views and understandings within dancer-choreographer relationships (Baron 2020; Knox 2013). Further, this section explores the range of dynamic interactions that can occur and impact dancers' self-esteem (Ryan & Deci, 2020), delving into instances where dancers may rely heavily on their choreographer's vision and expertise, and how trust may be essential in any choreographic relationship. Additionally, I discuss the constant evaluation dancers can undergo by their choreographers, artistic directors, and audiences, which can impact their feelings of vulnerability and self-judgement. Finally, this section outlines why motivation can play a crucial role in ballet dancers' rigorous pursuit of mastery by constantly working to improve their technique and artistry.

In the context of this research, it is essential to note that all choreographic experiences and relationships are considered collaborative, because people are working towards a common goal (Barbour, 2008), in this case, the choreographic work. However, the collaborative approach may vary from the more instructional and authoritative didactic facilitation to the more inclusive democratic collaboration, as theorised by Butterworth (2004). Examination of the relational aspects of choreographic practice, especially in a hierarchical professional ballet environment (Alterowitz, 2014), provides deeper understanding of the needs of dancers to maintain creatively confident dancer-choreographer relationships, where dancers can have a voice, and more effective working relationships may be established to develop their creative potential.

4.1.1 Trust

This section discusses trust in relation to optimal experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014), highlighting the importance some ballet dancers may place upon receiving external validation, and opportunities for autonomy within the choreographic process (Knox, 2013). Gaining trust through validation in the rehearsal environment (Baron, 2020) is discussed, as is the connection to self-esteem (Maslow, 1943).

The role of trust in building effective working relationships between dancers and choreographers is examined, providing a comprehensive understanding of the how trust may foster optimal experiences for ballet dancers.

Throughout the interviews, participants discussed experiences of autonomy coupled with validation within choreographic processes, and the impact this had on their levels of confidence and self-esteem. Baron's research (2020) has suggested that when dancers know they are performing well, providing extrinsic validation for technical and artistic excellence during the rehearsal process is just as beneficial for their self-esteem as it is for dancers who may be performing well but are intrinsically doubting themselves. The extrinsic validation can foster self-trust, and aids in maintaining dancers' sense of self-esteem (Knox, 2013). Additionally, for ballet dancers in rehearsal environments (Kim et al., 2022), building self-esteem through validation may generate optimal experiences (Nakamura & Csíkszentmihályi, 2020) when dancers are acknowledged for their skill. Such positive affirmations within a creative process can assist in making dancers feel trusted and valued (Kim et al., 2022). In her interview, Rhiannon shared that encouragement from a choreographer was important to her in rehearsal because it provided her with a sense of validation, which, in turn, made her determined to strive for excellence both artistically and technically. Rhiannon reflected,

> I think respect comes in with trusting the dancer, being patient with the dancer, encouraging, always encouraging for more and just not kind of giving up very early on because the dancer doesn't seem to completely fit into the movement quite yet.

Rhiannon's reflection identifies that receiving encouragement from a choreographer is important to her. She noted that validation at the beginning of a choreographic process was helpful to build interpersonal trust with the choreographer in her ability to deliver a creative performance of choreographic materials. Nordin-Bates (2020) discusses that encouragement during choreographic processes can foster learning and "promote artistic development" (p. 24) for dancers, which can lead to an enhanced experience of value as a performer. Similarly, Tabitha described feeling validated by a choreographer, explaining that it allowed her to trust her abilities during a choreographic process. For Tabitha, validation occurred when the choreographer provided opportunities for her to make technical and artistic choices in the choreography. Tabitha recalls the choreographer told her to, "make it your own…because if it feels right to you, it's going to be right for the movement.". In this example, the choreographer demonstrated a level of trust in Tabitha's ability to adapt and change movements. Tabitha remembers this experience as a moment when her skills were acknowledged and, as Rhiannon had also found, the choreographer's trust in her abilities to "make it her own" encouraged Tabitha to experiment creatively with movement generation and its performance.

Abigail discussed moments when a choreographer provided opportunities for creative autonomy for dancers. She explained that when a choreographer provides opportunity for autonomy, it demonstrates that they value the abilities and skills the dancers bring to the choreography.

> The best moments, I think, are when having tasks set and when I feel like something really clicks and starts rolling along is when the choreographer is looking at a particular person and they've gone completely off task. It needs to be broad, but it needs to be clear. It's about reading the room [because] if there's too much freedom, the dancer is stuck because we're thinking, well, how do I start? What do I do?.

Abigail identifies that choreographic direction needs to be "broad but clear" for her to feel most comfortable in generating movement. Autonomy may support creativity by encouraging dancers to feel less afraid to make decisions (Clements & Nordin-Bates, 2022). Abigail explained it is more challenging to trust the creative process, make autonomous decisions and expect choreographic output when clear direction is lacking because too much freedom can seem overwhelming. This might suggest that dancers' experiences of validation and trust can be generated when the choreographer provides an opportunity for autonomy and freedom with clear direction during the movement-generation process (Barbour, 2008; Gardner, 2011).

Abigail also discussed how higher levels of trust in choreographic relationships can encourage dancer autonomy to initiate communication with the choreographer and voice their ideas and questions throughout the creative process. However, she expressed that "giving [dancers] a voice doesn't mean that [they] run the studio." Explaining that if a choreographer allows too much room for dancers to voice their feelings, it can take away respect within the hierarchical choreographer-dancer dynamic (Newall & Fortin, 2012). This suggests that in Abigail's experience, too much trust can undermine a choreographer's responsibility to make choreographic decisions. She said that as a dancer, "if you know that the choreographer really wants to make it happen, you just shut up and do.". Abigail's experience suggests that dancers may need to make their own decisions on navigating choreographic dialogue and, in some instances, regardless of their confidence in being provided with autonomy and relational trust, should adhere to the choreographer's direction without question.

Laura shared thoughts on validation and autonomy within the choreographic process, and how this has impacted her feelings on choreographic trust. She felt that within a trusting environment, moments of technical or artistic autonomy provide dancers with space to be more "intuitive" in their dancing, meaning they have less need to rely on external validation to feel trust in themselves (Harrison, 2021). Laura also reflected upon moments she felt less "in tune" with herself and relied on validation from the choreographer. She remarked, "I was really seeking outside validation…because that's all I had

learned how to [do]. I learned to trust other people's opinions over my own.". It is possible that when Laura was presented with opportunities for autonomy within choreographic processes, her desire for external validation caused an innate trust in the choreographer and their feedback. Ballet training may cause dancers to rely on external feedback from others as a means to improve technique (Hopper et al., 2018). Both Laura and Rhiannon's experiences, although contrasting, demonstrate how trust may be built in the creative process through external validation from the choreographer.

Abigail, Rhiannon, Tabitha, and Laura's experiences show variation in how trust is impacted by dancers' experiences of autonomy and validation in choreographic processes. However, a common theme identified by all participants was the value they placed on personal validation and having opportunities to be autonomous during the choreographic process. Rehearsal processes can be complex (Baron, 2020), and dancers may rely on the choreographer's support to access certain freedoms, such as movement generation. Therefore, the participants' experiences could suggest that some dancers place greater importance upon external validation for creating trust within a choreographic environment. If so, autonomy may be an essential component for maintaining dancers' self-trust, and for building upon self-esteem founded in external validation. Placing value in external validation may also have an impact on dancers' feelings of judgement, especially if trust has already been established in the dancer-choreographer relationship.

4.1.2 Judgement

Through addressing the hierarchical impacts that judgement (Green, 1999; Foster-Sproull, 2017) can have on a ballet dancer's experience of choreography, this section explores participant experiences of dancer-choreographer communication and the impact this can have on dancer self-judgement in the creative process. This section first explores how judgement may be communicated, interpreted, and received, dependent upon how the choreographic process is facilitated. To do this I draw upon understandings of a democratic approach to contemporary choreographic processes (Butterworth, 2004) and locate this within a balletic environment (Homans, 2013; Turner & Wainwright, 2003). The participants experiences provide examples of how judgement founded in hierarchy (Knox, 2013; Martin, 2008) may impact dancers' self-esteem and levels of creative confidence. The following also addresses how a choreographic process may provide dancers with a voice through open communication (Knox, 2013), and alter their levels of self-esteem (Maslow, 1943).

Choreographic processes may involve judgement between dancers and choreographers (Knox, 2013). The participants shared their views on hierarchy within choreographic processes and how this may impact their working relationship with the choreographer. Ariana, Abigail, and Rhiannon identified that choreographic hierarchies (Section 3.3.3), may create both self-initiated judgement (Dryburgh & Fortin, 2010; Green, 2003), and judgement from the choreographer.

Ariana spoke about a choreographic process where she did not feel she could initiate communication with the choreographer when she and the other dancers were tasking (Section 3.2.2). She felt uncertain because the choreographer had provided an open-ended task, and the elevated status (Clements & Nordin-Bates, 2022) of the choreographer had created a wall within the relationship. This impacted the way Ariana could engage with the task and levels of judgement she found were self-initiated. Recalling the experience she said,

> I found it hard to put myself into the choreography because we had a huge amount of freedom. I found it really hard to kind of bring myself into it without judgement on myself, [I couldn't bring] emotionality to it, like little textures and nuances to the movement.

Within Ariana's experience, the choreographer had positioned themself and the dancers within a hierarchy which did not allow space for dancers to communicate with them as their superior. This marginalisation of the dancers (Claid, 2006) meant that Ariana felt that she could not vocalise questions or ask for more clarification because she felt the choreographer would judge her.

Rhiannon also had similar views to Ariana in that having channels available for open communication is important within hierarchical creative relationships so that she can best do her job. Rhiannon explained that when there is a lack of communication between dancer and choreographer, she notices higher levels of self-judgement (Dryburgh & Fortin, 2010). For Rhiannon, an inability to communicate and voice uncertainties created a higher sense of judgement, resulting in her "pulling back" both in her engagement with the choreographic material and in her interactions with the choreographer. For example, when tasking she explained,

> [I'm] not going to suggest [a movement] that could potentially be like, oh, no, that's ugly. The power dynamic could really affect that process.

Rhiannon's experience aligned with Ariana's feelings as she explained that she did not feel as though she could communicate with the choreographer when she was stuck.

Both Ariana and Rhiannon explained that being able to openly communicate with a choreographer through all stages of the creative process made them feel less judgement from the choreographer and less self-initiated judgement (Magee & Langner, 2008). However, Ariana noted that she did not believe it is the choreographer's responsibility to know when dancers might be stuck. She questioned, "How are they to know that I'm stuck in this weird place? Or that I think I'm too scared to embarrass myself or screw it up?". This could suggest that dancers do not expect choreographers to help them

unless the dancers ask, yet for dancers to feel comfortable enough to ask, they need to feel that their speaking up will be received respectfully (Newall & Fortin, 2012).

Tabitha discussed the first choreographic experience where she felt she could talk openly with a choreographer about creative elements. She recalls, "As soon as I started asking for things…started creating my own ideas, they were backed 100%.". In her interview, we discussed the notion that being able to verbally express concerns or ideas within a choreographic space is still considered a rarity in professional ballet environments due to there often being a prominent hierarchy (Alterowitz, 2014; Bomm, 2018; Forsyth & Kolenda,1966; Homans, 2013). Tabitha's experience is significant because it describes an instance where a choreographer was supportive of a dancer's contribution which may prepare more open ground for communication later in the process when crafting choreographic material may require judgement to develop and refine ideas.

In their interviews, Laura, Rhiannon, and Abigail also acknowledged the risks of speaking up. Knox's (2013) research highlighted instances where dancers used their voices within the creative process for "personal agentic action" (p. 83). The risk is that dancers voicing issues, challenges, and concerns, or even asking a question, can result in "cause for punishment" (Knox, 2013, p. 83), especially if interpersonal discussion is not welcomed by the choreographer. Abigail suggested that choreographers should "stand their ground and not let the dancers override them" when there is a verbal interaction. However, it is possible that conflicts may arise if the choreographer is utilising an authoritarian approach rather than democratic (Butterworth, 2004) or collaborative (Knox, 2013) facilitation in which open communication can occur. Whether there is direct cause for punishment within an authoritarian choreographic relationship, some dancers highlighted that the risk of this is enough to throw their self-esteem and confidence, and cause further self-initiated judgement.

Ariana discussed a task requiring her to go and make 16 counts of her own material and come back and share it with the choreographer in front of the rest of the dancers. She explained some of the internal dialogue she was grappling with whilst undertaking the set task, saying,

> I felt a lot of judgement from myself just trying to prove that I could do this and could make it look good…Then I also felt judgement, whether part of it was in my mind, part of it was reality, I felt judgment from the other people in the environment that day. I think that we didn't have a really clear, open kind of communication line. I wouldn't have felt comfortable going to [the choreographer] and being like, I'm struggling with this.

The lack of open communication Ariana identified led to her experiencing higher levels of judgement within the choreographic process. She felt that this was heightened by feeling that she could not speak up. A dancer's ability to communicate and relate to others within dance spaces is considered significant in promoting democratic environments (Butterworth 2004; Foster-Sproull, 2017; Knox, 2013). Functioning democratically within a hierarchical choreographic process may be vital to maintain dancers' self-esteem through providing them with a voice and with opportunities to communicate (Fink & Woschnjak, 2011; Nordin-Bates, 2020). Abigail spoke to the concept of giving dancers a voice, and what it means to her. In Abigail's experience,

> It's always been the highlight of my career every year that we get someone that is willing to give the dancers a voice and a [conversational] back and forth. And it has to be in a very respectful way. I have always liked being the underdog and the supporter of the 'main event'. So, my experiences collaborating with choreographers has always been the best.

Abigail's statement that she likes being the "underdog" in choreographic processes indicates that her experiences may have involved an implied hierarchy, naturally placing herself beneath the choreographer. Abigail also described that supporting the choreographer was important to her and that it has led to the "best" choreographic experiences, and reasoned this was because she "knew her place" in the creative relationship. For Abigail, when a sense of choreographic hierarchy amalgamated with open and respectful communication, she felt she could trust the choreographer to consider her input and ideas, and not be concerned as to how they might judge her. Rhiannon's experiences reflected an affinity with Abigail's, because she considers choreographic hierarchy important. She explained that within facilitative processes,

> …we're taught very early on to be obedient, to copy, to literally mimic what's happening. When there's [too much] of a collaborative approach, I think that obviously the power dynamic kind of attempts to even out so that dancer and choreographer are kind of on the same level power wise, because you need to give the dancers enough confidence and feel like they have enough voice and value to contribute ideas. Then if we still feel like we're obedient and under our teacher or boss, whatever.

Rhiannon feels that dancers having a voice is important, and establishing trust can be more straightforward when the choreographer takes a clear and direct approach to the creative process (Clements & Nordin-Bates, 20222; Gardner, 2011). In an environment where the choreographer takes charge, Rhiannon said she can 'throw' herself into the choreographic process more and with less

concern about judgement because she knows what is expected of her. For example, during a creative process, a dancer may be expected to learn and master material by "receiv[ing] and process[ing] instruction" (Butterworth, 2004, p. 55), which Rhiannon explained is easier when she understands there is a clear choreographic hierarchy.

Ariana indicated that when she was out of her comfort zone choreographically, her self-judgement could be impacted by the actions of the choreographer. Conversations or discussions with the choreographer could elevate her sense of self-esteem to counter her sometimes harsh self-judgement. Ariana spoke of having an "alliance" with the choreographer inside a choreographic hierarchy. During a choreographic process where the relationship felt less hierarchical, she explained,

> There was the ability to have that discussion around how to make it work for me, for all of us involved, and the same for everybody else, which was really nice. I think I had more ability to have a bit more choice in the process, but I do think that that was relative to the lack of choice in other things that were happening at the time. It really just made me feel a lot more comfortable and have a lot more agency in that moment.

Ariana acknowledged that being able to have a discussion with the choreographer and her colleagues, with opportunities for autonomy (Buss & Westlund, 2002) and agency (Elder-Vass, 2010), made her feel more receptive to judgement. It may be that facilitating open communication and providing a place for dancers to voice their thoughts can change the way a hierarchical choreographic relationship and therefore judgement is experienced. Considering that dancer feedback and the evaluation of dancers provide opportunities to either foster or diminish a dancers' self-esteem (Rowe et al., 2020; Baron, 2020), it might be possible that the communicative mode of delivery is also an important aspect in how choreographers communicate with dancers. Further, the use of judgement could become more akin to that in a productive feedback environment, with negotiation between both dancer and choreographer, where a critical stance may still be a positive experience, as both are working toward the same choreographic goal.

All five participants' experience of judgement within the creative process were impacted by the levels of communication the dancer's felt were available to them within different choreographic processes. Having open and clear communication between dancer and choreographer was noted by participants as developing a relationship of trust which may reduce dancers' negative experiences of judgement. However, this does perpetuate the idea of the passive and docile dancer (Green, 2003), prompting questions of what may need to occur within the dancer-choreographer dynamic so that dancers feel empowered and confident to communicate verbally in choreographic environments regardless of any risk of being judged for doing so.

4.1.3 Vulnerability

Participants in this research highlighted the importance of a creative process involving both a relationship of care between dancer and choreographer which establishes space for dancers to be vulnerable (Newall & Fortin, 2012), and consideration for its impacts on dancer confidence. All five participants identified that when care was present in dancer-choreographer relationships, having vulnerability in moments where they may not have been creatively confident did not feel as challenging. This section investigates the importance of care and self-esteem on vulnerability within the participants' experiences (Baron, 2020). It also discusses how relationships encompassing respectful connections can foster confident dynamic interactions (Maslow, 1962), making dancers feel valued in their vulnerability.

Abigail spoke about a choreographer who she felt valued all aspects of her character both inside and outside of the creative process. She recalled,

> He saw us as human beings. He saw us for who we were and how we sort of connected with each other…he'd try and bring our personality traits and strengthen them and pull them through.

Abigail expressed that being seen as "human beings" was uncommon, as was having a choreographer who was interested in the person she was beyond dancing. Therefore, for Abigail, processes which involved a choreographer caring about her holistically elevated her self-esteem (Knox, 2019; Rogers, 2000), especially when feeling vulnerable. Laura also echoed Abigail's sentiments expressing that she has, "never felt like a dancer first", rather, she feels like a human that dances, noting that sometimes when expected to only be the "dancer" version of herself, it can make her feel more vulnerable. Laura's perspective on interactions both outside and within studio environments is to approach them with the mindset that, "It's me and them as people. Always," meaning she feels respected and valued when a relational approach is reciprocated by a choreographer.

Laura also recalled that in moments when she has had meaningful interactions with choreographers outside of the rehearsal environment (Nordin-Bates, 2020), it elevated the amount of care she contributed and felt during rehearsals. Foster-Sproull (2017) identified that choreographers "may slip between approaches in the way they interact with a dancer within the space of one task" (p. 89). Variable approaches to a task did not worry Laura, however, in moments when a caring, personable approach was not reciprocated, Laura would find it more challenging to be vulnerable or experiment with choreographic material. Both Abigail and Laura mentioned that when a choreographer gives personal, authentic attention to a dancer it makes them feel valued. Maslow (1962) identified that within human interactions, feeling valued is a necessity for maintaining self-esteem. A higher sense of

self-esteem may encourage dancers to push beyond their comfort zone (Foster-Sproull, 2017; Knox, 2013) whilst creating or performing choreographic material if they feel acknowledged for the vulnerability they feel when doing so.

Knox (2013) has proposed that caring about the choreographic process may mean the dancers also feel cared for and valued, suggesting that vulnerability can play a significant role in the choreographic process and the experiences of the dancers and the choreographer. Perhaps it would also be of value to consider how caring for the dancers first (Nordin-Bates, 2020) may impact the choreographic process and provide conditions for an optimal experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014). Acknowledging the vulnerability that dancers may experience during the creative process, it may be possible to create a supportive environment for the dancers, leading to a more effective and meaningful choreographic process. Additionally, in regard to achieving an optimal experience, Csíkszentmihályi (2014) has suggested that vulnerability can be an important component in achieving a state of flow. Choreographically, this could occur when the dancer is fully immersed and engaged in the creative process.

Tabitha discussed that as a freelance dancer, she feels most trusted and respected because she is "being hired for the whole package of me. With how I move, how I think, how I am in the space, which people appreciate. And I really appreciate that I can just turn up as myself," because it allows her to be vulnerable and get the most out of a choreographic process. For Tabitha, vulnerability can mean open mindedness, and having people value and appreciate her for what she is able to bring into a choreographic process means that they value her as a person, which evokes a sense of care (Rogers, 1969). She explained why she feels valued this way, reflecting on years of rigorous training, and a range of rehearsal environments and creative experiences,

> Often in ballet, you're told to leave all your shit at the door, right? You're told to just leave anything that's happening at the studio, come into class, do your class and just escape from that, which is great. But then when you leave class, you have to deal with that. So I flip it. I bring all of that into rehearsal. Bring all these feelings, leave the ballet at the door, leave the judgement, leave the technical abilities, leave all that stress at the door. Bring in yourself. Bring in what you're feeling. Apply that to what you're doing, and then see if that helps you find release in that way.

Tabitha placed high value on being able to "bring all of it into rehearsal" however she also explained that the choreographic environment needs to make dancers feel comfortable to do so. To "bring in what you're feeling" requires vulnerability (Forsyth & Kolenda, 1966; Harrison, 2021; Rogers, 1969). Vulnerability can occur within caring relationships because it requires the dynamic interactions to

encompass trust and respect (Bandura, 2006). Therefore, it could be possible that to generate trust between a dancer and choreographer, an optimal experience where dancers feel they can be vulnerable with their choreographers is required. Ariana also spoke about the importance of bringing emotion and feelings into the studio, highlighting value in a choreographer instigating interactions to make dancers feel cared for. Ariana said,

> [the choreographer has] created this piece with these dancers, you need to know where your dancers are at. You need to know how they're feeling. You need to make sure that they feel valued and respected.

Ariana described the physical and emotional aspects of dancing as being inevitably intertwined, as scholars Petrides et al. (2006) have also noted in their research, meaning that vulnerability may feel as if it is physically manifested in the body if she is feeling emotionally vulnerable.

Similarly to Tabitha, Ariana also highlighted that sometimes vulnerability in life outside the studio can impact what happens inside the studio, and that there is only so much capacity for someone to shut out all of their non-dance related emotions before they will begin to impact them within the rehearsal environment (Petrides et al., 2006). Having a choreographer check in on dancers was an important part of creating relationships of care (Newall & Fortin, 2012) for Ariana because it displayed respect for dancers' emotional and physical states. When Ariana felt valued for being herself in the space, this positively impacted her self-esteem because she felt that she could be vulnerable and open with the choreographer if needed, rather than let it sit within her mind, body, and rehearsal practice.

Rhiannon acknowledged some rare moments she had felt valued by a choreographer for her life outside the studio, as a person beyond the articulation of her body, and how this impacted her ability to be vulnerable inside the studio space. She did find that communicating doubt or uncertainty within a creative process was challenging (Mattingly & Young, 2020). For Rhiannon, a choreographer treating dancers as human beings outside of a studio environment correlated with respecting their uniqueness inside the studio (Baron, 2020) and, especially, understanding what may make them feel vulnerable, and the impact this may have on dancer confidence.

Rhiannon spoke about the challenges of pressure and vulnerability, sharing a moment when she had been given a lead role in a new ballet as second cast, at a time early on in her career. Being in the early stages of her professional life, she was not usually cast in lead roles, due to the traditional hierarchical structure of ballet companies as outlined by Homans (2013) and Turner & Wainwright (2003). It was a big opportunity for Rhiannon, she felt excited but also high amounts of pressure at

having to step up—a potentially vulnerable position—if she was being compared to other principal dancers who usually got lead roles. However, the choreographer of this work was able to create a caring environment where Rhiannon's self-esteem was fostered and encouraged (Newall & Fortin, 2012). Rhiannon described the process,

> I felt like she cared about me as a person, and that was really lovely. And I think I felt, not super insecure doing that role, but kind of weaker, like, I knew that I wasn't meeting the level that [the first cast dancer] was when she did it, because she was amazing. So I think there was a little bit of insecurity there, and [the choreographer] was very encouraging and never set me against [the other dancer's] standard. She wanted to make this look good for me. So rather than being like, oh, make sure you bend like [the other dancer] does here. It wasn't like that. It was just like, "you should emphasize this part of the movement, because that's when you look really good".

Rhiannon's example of this choreographer "making an effort" to engage with her outside of the choreographic process seemed to have made a considerable impact on her, aiding her confidence inside the studio. Rhiannon explained it was not often that a choreographer had been interested in her for more than her body. She said that realising what it was like to feel valued as her whole self within a choreographic process was a "wow moment" for her. The respect that Rhiannon felt through this choreographer's actions created a relationship where she felt she was able to be vulnerable in the process of learning the lead role. There was care she was receiving from the choreographer, emphasising her unique strengths and characteristics she brought to the role (Kim et al., 2022). When Rhiannon explained how this choreographic experience which encompassed care positively impacted the performance of the work, she explained, "I can just trust that a little bit more on stage or in the studio without needing the confirmation or validation that I've chosen the right emotion or chosen the right feeling for the piece.". From Rhiannon's experience, a choreographic relationship based on care, within environments with high levels of pressure and vulnerability, can assist a dancer's sense of self-confidence in their ability to deliver (Fredrickson, 2009).

Laura provided a similar example to Rhiannon where a caring relationship with the choreographer during a choreographic process had set her up for more self-confidence on stage. Laura mentioned a time she was cast in a challenging role which made her feel more vulnerable, yet she had felt care and support from the choreographer, which meant she had "trust [in herself to be able] to deliver a great performance.". For Laura, establishing trust through dynamic interactions early had triggered an increase in her self-esteem (Maslow, 1943). She described,

I remember the music; the solo follows a minute's silence where the woman just
stands and stares at the audience. And then she begins the solo. And I remember
starting the solo, and the music didn't begin, and my heart was pounding and racing,
and I wasn't sure what was going to happen. But in that moment, the only way to get
through was to just fully…be in that moment, to really honour the dance and the
space and just to give everything that I possibly could give...It was one of my
favourite moments on stage, just to really be, and to just give. It did feel like a
moment of real openness, vulnerability, and authenticity. It felt electric…It was like,
this is trust. That I had to deliver something, and I knew that I could.

Laura's description of herself in that moment, saying that "it felt electric", is a key indicator that even
within the heightened uncertainty she was experiencing, she was able to use vulnerability as a form of
confidence to perform. The presence and attention Laura describes, "giving her all" to the
choreography she was delivering, seemed to elevate her ability of experiencing an optimal
performance moment on stage. Pre-empting the 'electrifying' performance moment, Laura spoke to
the supportiveness of the choreographer during the creative process. This suggests that when a
choreographer engages in caring, dynamic interactions with dancers beyond the studio, a deeper, more
personal connection can be founded, potentially adding value to the choreographic process and
carrying dancer confidence through from studio to stage (Noice & Noice, 2006; Seaman, 2006). When
Laura said that on stage felt like "a moment of real openness, vulnerability and authenticity", perhaps
meaning can be found in the investment from the choreographer, as she experienced, during the
creative process (Petrides et al., 2006), as this appeared to help Laura trust herself, and lean into the
uncertainty of the moment to have an optimal experience on stage.

All of the participants indicated that having dynamic interactions with their choreographer outside of
the creative process had notable impact upon the amount of care they felt within the creative process.
Abigail, Ariana, Tabitha, Rhiannon, and Laura's experiences of dynamic interactions within
relationships of care provide an understanding of how trust can be built in a choreographic process
(Newall & Fortin, 2012). Their narratives suggest that a ballet dancer's desires, to be seen and
understood as a human being and not "to separate the human worth from performance" (Nordin-
Bates, 2020, p. 29), can be achieved through a choreographer instigating a relationship of respect and
care and forming connections outside the studio. It may be that caring relationships provide the
platform for dancers to be vulnerable within a choreographic process (Knox, 2013), and feel
comfortable bringing all of themselves emotionally and physically into a choreographic process.

4.1.4 Motivation

For all five of the interview participants, a prominent theme arose when discussing motivation and a dancer's eagerness to constantly progress and improve. All considered themselves as intrinsically motivated individuals yet noted the impact an external influence, such as a choreographer, can have on dancers' motivation levels (Kim et al., 2022). As discussed, in regard to validation (Section 4.1.1), encouragement can help dancers feel acknowledged for their demonstrated skill (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014). To follow, the narratives of Abigail, Tabitha, Laura, Rhiannon and Ariana detail the connection between their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Maslow, 1943; Ryan and Deci, 2012) and optimal experience within choreographic processes.

Maslow (1943) locates self-growth within his hierarchy of human needs under the umbrella of self-esteem. This research has identified that gaining esteem based on self-assessment is vital in reaching potential (Maslow, 1943). If dancers are able to self-assess and therefore self-motivate intrinsically, this may assist them in reaching the technical and artistic potential they crave within choreographic movement (Foster-Sproull, 2017). A choreographer's encouragement may feed dancers' needs to constantly progress and improve (Nordin-Bates, 2020). Speaking with Abigail, our discussion touched upon the tension that needs to be maintained within a challenging choreographic task and a dancer's capabilities in order to stay stimulated, concentrated, and energised. She explained that in choreographic creation, "there's always more, there's no pinnacle," and although she loved finding her own niche in choreography, she also appreciated it when, "a choreographer doesn't necessarily settle for the dancer's default movement.". This suggests that Abigail may have maintained self-esteem and confidence in her technical and artistic skill set by being able to draw upon a choreographer's encouragement and direction as motivation.

Tabitha also placed importance upon striving for further improvement and constant excellence. When recalling a particularly challenging but fulfilling choreographic process, she explained that the relationship between her and the choreographer was "a very special kind of connection, and an appreciation for working together with someone", and that having the opportunity to work closely meant finding ways to challenge her abilities was organically motivating. Tabitha also noted that she always puts pressure on herself to work well and adapt to a choreographer's expectations, but also greatly values when a choreographer initiates an environment where "if it feels right to you, it's going to be right for the movement", because that feels encouraging.

Abigail and Tabitha's perspectives may be understood as dancers utilising their own skills to create motivation for themselves (Pickard, 2012), in conjunction with a choreographer's facilitation of an encouraging environment. By having some guidance by the choreographer as to the direction of the work, then leveraging on this to cultivate their own flow of motivation, Abigail and Tabitha's

experiences correspond with Csíkszentmihályi's (2014) theorising which acknowledged that action and awareness merge, potentially leading to a more optimal experience. Analysing this through the lens of motivation, ultimately Abigail and Tabitha's motivation may come from their own capabilities, while the choreographer's facilitation helps create an environment that enhances their motivation (Amabile, 1993; Maslow, 1943; Rheinberg & Engeser, 2018) and supports their journey towards a more optimal experience.

Rhiannon discussed that as a goal-oriented dancer, initial encouragement at the beginning of the process can set a motivational tone (Hall & Hill, 2012) for the ensuing choreographic process. She felt that it was vital for choreographers to foster determination in dancers to strive toward a technical and artistic goal from the beginning of a choreographic process, describing the importance of having a "united vision [because] you're aware that the process can be tedious." Being provided with clear goals to aim for prompted higher levels of self-motivation to achieve them (Ryan & Deci, 2020). She explained that in the early stages of creating a choreographic work, movements can feel messy and not sit in the body comfortably. However, encouragement from the choreographer to continue to experiment with uncomfortable movements validated her technical and artistic abilities and made her feel motivated to achieve control over movements which may start as messy.

Considering that choreographic creations and rehearsals are facilitated events (Butterworth, 2012; Green, 2001; Knox, 2013), it may also be of value to consider how dancers may be motivated to work toward flow state with the possibility of achieving this on stage, as well as in the creative process, if aiming for an optimal experience. If flow state is considered a significant reason to utilise motivation as an optimal experience for dancers (Baron, 2020), what might be instigated within a choreographic process to cause it to occur? Tabitha, Abigail and Rhiannon's experiences suggested that flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014) can contribute to the maintenance of their self-esteem through encompassing self-respect, achievement, confidence, and responsibility (Maslow, 1962), which can foster higher levels of motivation. Baron (2020) and Foster-Sproull (2017) have connected dancers' higher working motivation with improved self-esteem, and Ryan and Deci (2020) have further suggested that feeling a sense of achievement may come from holding a high amount of intrinsic motivation which may in turn also be supported by receiving extrinsic motivation. Therefore, for dancers, encouragement, positive affirmations, and feedback from choreographers may have the power to affect dancers' confidence and self-image (Nordin-Bates, 2020), and assist in building respectful, supportive, and enjoyable relationships in the dance studio (Knox, 2013). Within a balletic context, dancers seem to feel as though they can work at an optimal level of motivation when their intrinsic motivation can be validated and encouraged.

4.2 "I like being the muse": Ballet Dancers' Experiences of Creative Confidence

Within this section, person-centred theory (Rogers, 1961), in conjunction with dancer-centred theory (Knox, 2013), is drawn upon to understand dancers' experiences of creative confidence and how this could lead to an optimal experience. In the context of this research, creative confidence can be contextualised as a ballet dancer understanding and valuing their ability to produce creative ideas during all stages of the choreographic process (Fink & Woschnjak, 2011). Kelley and Kelley (2012; 2013) discuss creative confidence as the notion that a person believes they have creative ideas and possesses the ability to act upon them, stating that "creativity is something you practice, not just a talent you're born with" (Kelley & Kelley, 2012, p. 12). An emergent theme for all the interview participants was an apparent correlation between creative confidence and optimal experience, because although each dancer's experience of 'optimal' was different, they often recalled having a higher sense of confidence with their positive choreographic experiences.

The following subsections analyse what creative confidence looks like within the areas of emotional security (Bandura, 2001), collaborative and didactic environments (Butterworth, 2004; Knox, 2013), challenge-skill balance (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014), and as an overall optimal experience. It became apparent through the course of the interviews that the part of the process where dancers' creative confidence was most vulnerable was during the movement generation stage of a choreographic process. This can be located within Foster-Sproull's (2023) prosumer-dancer paradigm and prosumer-dancer activations of choreographic technique (PACT). Aligning the interviewees' experiences in the movement generation phase of PACT (Foster-Sproull, 2023), a lack of dancer confidence may emerge when the dancer is either a "contributor and partnered prosumer, creator and delegated prosumer, [or] co-owner and empowered prosumer" (p. 2). This prompted my curiosity as to how trust and motivation might be enhanced within the movement generation phase of the choreographic process so that dancer confidence can be elevated.

4.2.1 Confidence through Emotional Security

Bettencourt (2014), Csíkszentmihályi (1990) and Rogers (1961) have described creativity as resulting from an individual's relationships. These perspectives have led me to further investigate what may occur to a dancer's sense of confidence (Bandura, 2001; Maslow, 1979) when they feel supported by their choreographer. As discussed throughout the subsections of Section 4.1, dancers' experiences of trust, judgement, vulnerability, and motivation can be impacted by dancer-choreographer interactions. In the discussion of creative confidence in the ensuing paragraphs, further connections to the four key topic areas emerge, particularly in relation to emotional security and safe rehearsal spaces, and how these may impact a dancer's overall self-esteem (Maslow, 1979).

Throughout some of the participant interviews, it became apparent that dancers placed importance on feeling emotional security within choreographic rehearsal environments. Laura recalled an experience of working on the creation of a new ballet involving self-led tasking. She shared,

> I remember feeling like I had permission to make it my own. Which inevitably made me confident enough and gave me the ability to do that. So I'm grateful for that.

Laura's recollection indicates that she felt confident when the choreographer gave her "permission to make [the material her] own.". This links to Butterworth's (2004) articulations of facilitative choreographic practice, and where a choreographer provides autonomy for the dancers to generate content (Fink & Woschnjak, 2011). Laura also said that she felt "grateful" for the trust granted to her to make creative decisions. She explained that the choreographer of this process treated each dancer "as a person, rather than just a figure of the game," and that the whole choreographic process was "inspiring, fun and energetic." The choreographer's facilitation made Laura feel respected and encouraged, which led her be confident in the working relationship she and the choreographer had. This enhanced Laura's experience within the choreographic process, and lead to a more optimal state (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014) of self-confidence (Möbius et al., 2022). Given such observations, consideration in the future could be focused on whether confidence is often discussed in relation to a dancer's technical or artistic ability, and less so in regard to their emotional confidence and security.

Linking with Laura's experience of confidence in rehearsal, navigating emotional security in the creative process also arose for Rhiannon and Ariana when recalling moments where they were tasked with generating creative contributions in the making of new ballets. Ariana described she was in the studio with two other dancers and a choreographer; they all moved and created some movement together which they continued to build upon. In this moment she felt emotionally secure, explaining,

> I really enjoyed it because it felt like a safe place to explore how I wanted to move, and we were in the process with the choreographer the whole way through.

Ariana's acknowledgement of being "with the choreographer" suggests she felt more involved in this creative process than others, and that this provided a sense of enjoyment, empowerment, and therefore increased confidence. Rhiannon also had a choreographer who she felt was really trying to work "with" the dancers. This choreographer was very open about the deep origins of the work being created, and really valued the dancers' emotional contributions to the work, and how these may impact physical choreography. Rhiannon recalls,

It feels quite selfless for [the choreographer] to step back and be like, well, this dancer is putting herself out there...I should make sure that she feels comfortable.

Rhiannon further explained that she always tries to "attach emotional connection to the movement" because it makes the movement flow and sit better in her body (Pouillaude, 2017). In some choreographic processes this has been more difficult for her to achieve if she has felt emotionally insecure, particularly creatively, within a rehearsal space (Knox, 2019). Rhiannon describes this emotional connection as her most comfortable form of creative contribution to choreographic material, and one that can sometimes develop into creative confidence in the movement generation process also.

Both Tabitha and Laura observed that rises in their own creative confidence correlated with times a choreographer had facilitated an emotionally secure and safe rehearsal space. Kelley and Kelly (2012) have connected creative confidence levels to a person's sense of emotional security, and Baron's research (2020) has highlighted the impact a safe rehearsal space can have on dancers' emotional security. In line with Baron's (2020) and Kelley and Kelley's (2012) findings, Tabitha and Laura also both acknowledged their experiences encompassed trustful relationships and a motivating working environment, which would instil a sense of trust in their own abilities. Tabitha explained that what she feels has ultimately created who she is as both a dancer and a human is "not be[ing] afraid to go after something [and] not be afraid to ask for something I feel I'd be able to do," and that emotionally secure spaces have provided her the opportunity to do so confidently: a concept Petrides et al. (2006) also discuss. Laura also discussed why a safe rehearsal space is vital, because there are multiple people involved in the overall creative output, saying, "You're not trying to deliver something on your own," and that a collective confidence (Möbius et al., 2022) with the other dancers, or the choreographer for example, can make a creative process less daunting.

Additionally, Laura described a creative process where she felt emotionally secure with the choreographer, explaining, "I trust myself to take the risks. I trust myself to be able to deliver." This may suggest that feelings of emotional security in the choreographer-dancer relationship dynamic can lead to a culture that is conducive to both a more confident and a more optimal experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014) for dancers.

When dancers feel emotionally secure in the approaches a choreographer takes to facilitating creative environments, they may feel more confident to generate and present choreographic content. They are potentially enabled to develop and grow personally and artistically (Barbour, 2008), which, as Knox (2013) discusses, dancers can do more confidently when they feel safe and supported. Laura further stated, "If you're comfortable making mistakes, you can actually make progress.". In an environment

where the working relationship dynamics feel emotionally safe for dancers, possibilities for a dancer to experience empowerment, develop self-confidence, self-determination, and self-esteem, and grow personally and artistically may occur (Barbour, 2008; Knox 2013).

4.2.2 Confidence in Didactic and Democratic Environments

Rhiannon noted that for her, democratic (Butterworth, 2004) or collaborative approaches were not types of facilitation she enjoyed because she does not consider herself creative. She preferred a more didactic facilitation (Butterworth, 2004) where hierarchical positioning and roles are clear because this gave her confidence. Rhiannon explained,

> I don't feel like I'm a very creative person in actually creating material from nothing. I feel more confident, and I enjoy more, interpreting other people's skills because I find the ability to choreograph amazing, and I don't understand how people can do it. I've never had an interest in doing it, but I like being the muse.

Being "the muse" invokes notions of docility (Green, 2003) as a dancer interacting with a choreographer. It may be that under certain circumstances a choreographer encourages docility within dancers through their approach to rehearsal and instruction. It was interesting to observe the tension which seemed to be present between Rhiannon's confidence in her technical and artistic abilities, and her lack of desire, confidence, and self-belief in her ability to utilise her skills when given opportunities to generate movement. Rhiannon also acknowledged the often-competitive environment of ballet (Forsyth & Kolenda, 1966; Morris, 2008) and how this can be further heightened within a choreographic process. Rhiannon mentioned her desire to always impress the choreographer commenting that "wanting to be picked and wanting to be liked" were initial motivating factors when first beginning a new choreographic work. In these early stages of the creative process Rhiannon identified an objective to appear confident in her abilities, especially if she wanted to stand a chance of being selected for a role. She discussed how the complexity of navigating competition through the beginning of a choreographic process can create tension between dancers. Building from this observation, Tabitha recalled witnessing her peers "so physically and mentally drain[ed]" due to how choreographers facilitated a choreographic process. Tabitha and Rhiannon's comments drew me to consider the connection between a didactic facilitation process (Butterworth, 2004) and the competitive environment that may be present within studio practice in the ballet industry (Martin, 2008), and the impact it may have on dancers' confidence.

Acknowledging that rehearsals are controlled environments (Baron, 2020), dancers may rely on choreographers to help manage their self-esteem through the facilitation of safe rehearsal spaces. Baron (2020) has suggested this may include constructive feedback and positive affirmations. This

prompts me to question how much a dancer's self-esteem and confidence depends on how the choreographer acts or how the environment is managed (Clements & Nordin-Bates, 2022). Further, I was also interested to consider how trust and motivation might be affected when the facilitated rehearsal space is not an optimally safe and emotionally secure space where dancers feel confident. Abigail and Ariana described different experiences of confidence in democratic environments, but both acknowledged that when collaborating, a facilitative creative environment (Butterworth 2004; Foster-Sproull 2017) within a hierarchy can be a more comfortable environment than a didactic one. For both Abigail and Ariana, this was connected to the working relationships between choreographers and dancers which gave them a sense of confidence.

Abigail noted that she prefers being given challenging movements that extend her vocabulary, saying that "It can't just be choreography placed on your body", and that challenge within an optimally functioning working relationship brings out the best in her. Ariana also acknowledged that she enjoys being given challenging movements, noting that, "Even if the movement doesn't feel comfortable, if the space is comfortable, then it somehow feels okay.". Both Abigail and Ariana felt that by being pushed in their abilities, they were shown more respect within a simultaneously didactic and democratic (Butterworth, 2004) choreographic relationship and it made them feel more eager to contribute collaboratively.

Laura discussed her experiences of didactic and democratic (Butterworth, 2004) choreographic environments, highlighting a shift she felt as she progressed during her career. Initially, Laura's confidence would be boosted when she would be chosen for a particular role, whereas later in her career, it was having opportunities to create collaboratively that impacted her confidence. She explained two pivotal moments,

> I remember feeling so just filled with joy and excitement. And like I had been chosen, I was good enough. Interesting, because reflecting on that, I can see that moment. I felt so excited because I had been chosen rather than the actual gift of being able to create. Whereas later in my life, I had a very similar experience, and someone had trusted me to have more of a contribution. And I [had]the same feeling, but [through] a different lens or [from] a different perspective completely. It was not that I had been chosen to do that, but it was because they were trusting me. And that's wonderful. But because I had the joy of being able to actually create and express as well.

Laura's experience suggests that it is possible for dancers to appreciate both didactic and democratic approaches to choreography. Clements and Nordin-Bates (2022) have discussed how, "Dancers can be inspired [choreographically] through autonomy support" (p. 11). This may also suggest that as

dancers become more experienced and confident generally, their needs within didactic or democratic processes shift. Knox (2013) positioned a dancer-centred approach to choreography as providing the opportunity for dancers to engage as 'agents' within choreographic practice, where they are supported to feel confident in their approaches and contributions to a choreographic work. This may also suggest that a dancer wants their creative 'voice' to be heard within the dance-making process (Foster-Sproull, 2017). As noted by the participants in this study, feedback from choreographers and the ability for dancers and choreographers to verbally communicate throughout the choreographic process impacted their levels of trust, motivation, and creative confidence both individually and collectively. This raises questions as to how choreographic feedback may be approached in a democratic (Butterworth, 2004) environment to be beneficial to a dancers' self-esteem. Rhiannon, Tabitha, Abigail, Ariana, and Laura have all described their varying views and feelings about how didactic and democratic environments impact their confidence, in both negative and positive ways. Therefore, aligning with BDCCC, it may be worth considering how a didactic process could be optimally facilitated within a hierarchical relationship, to minimise risk to ballet dancers' self-esteem and confidence, just as democratic approaches can.

4.2.3 Creative Confidence as an Optimal Experience

Dancers are often expected to learn and perform a diverse choreographic programme (Turner & Wainwright, 2003), which can challenge their confidence levels, particularly within a more contemporary-style performance (Petrides et al., 2006). Sometimes, during the creative process, dancers' levels of motivation, and confidence, may be impacted if creating and learning the choreography feels unfamiliar. Rhiannon and Abigail both shared meaningful moments about creative processes where they felt a harmony and flow between their motivation and confidence levels in the rehearsal studio, despite feeling in unfamiliar choreographic territory. They both described having a 'fine line' between being challenged enough and feeling overwhelmed. Their experiences can be further explored by locating them within optimal experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014), specifically in relation to ballet (Nordin-Bates, 2020). Both Rhiannon and Abigail explained that being in a state of high engagement, focus, and enjoyment in the choreographic process was when they functioned most optimally, and this assisted how confident they felt overall. Abigail described one of these moments,

> You know, when you're on your game and you're like, yeah, physically, you felt everything… then we started working with [the choreographer] on different bits and bobs. Then that was when I was just like, yeah, I've got the room. Everyone by then had sort of stopped working. They're all tired. They were sort of just taking a break here and there, walking around, chatting a little bit. And then I knew it was like, my rehearsal. I could see in the corner of my eye. Obviously. I was like, oh, yeah. I'm

doing something right here, but I was loving what was happening inside my body. I was like, I don't care if [the choreographer] likes it or not. This feels awesome.

Abigail recalled that she was fully aware of everything transpiring around her, the other dancers, the choreographer, her sense of self within the studio space, explaining that "a couple of minutes into that head space, you sort of just catch yourself and you're like, holy shit. I'm in it.". Abigail's recollection of that specific rehearsal was a time she knew she was performing to the best of her abilities, she was performing optimally, and felt fully confident in that creative space. Abigail further described this moment as being in flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014), saying she was not concerned by anything or anyone else in the studio with her, and was intensely focused and enjoying herself which, she noted, felt "awesome.". This caused me to consider how Abigail's state of flow in that moment may have affected her self-esteem, and therefore her confidence, in that moment. Her description of this particular rehearsal suggests that she was experiencing high levels of self-esteem because she was feeling respected and recognised but also free and independent (Maslow, 1943). Creatively, Abigail felt confident in her ability to produce and deliver what was required of her, suggesting that her sense of creative confidence (Kelley & Kelley, 2012) coupled with being in flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014) was providing her with an optimal experience of the choreographic process.

Rhiannon also recalled a time when she felt highly stimulated and engaged in a choreographic process because the movement was complicated, but not overwhelmingly so, and it pushed her. She explained that when she finds herself fully absorbed in a process, in her "own zone", she engages with both the choreographer and the choreographic material more confidently, and this feels fulfilling to her. Rhiannon explained that an optimal experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014) of the creative process is when she is able to "enjoy the challenge of finding [the] balance to be receptive, but then also take [her] own spin on the material, in a respectful way.". For Rhiannon, "taking her own spin" on the choreography, is when her creative confidence (Kelley & Kelley, 2012), is at its highest. This suggests that if a choreographer provides an engaging, stimulating environment for dancers, it contributes to a dancer's ability to experience a more optimal way of working (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014), which, as identified by Rhiannon, may assist the dancer to maximise their confidence.

Tabitha spoke about some similar experiences of being 'in the zone' similarly to Abigail and Rhiannon, and the correlation between having an optimal experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014) elevated by her creative confidence (Kelley & Kelley, 2012). However, for Tabitha the most meaningful moments were when she could comfortably carry the creative confidence which she had during choreographic processes, onto the stage, identifying the impact an optimal choreographic experience can have on her performance. To explain this further, she transported me to a time on

stage, premiering a contemporary ballet work after what had been a complex and quick, but creatively fulfilling choreographic process,

> I noticed as soon as the curtain came up and just, the music dropped, and it was very atmospheric. I was in this beautiful white, flowy, light kind of dress, and I started to move, really slowly. And I have a moment and...we're all standing on stage, and then there's a solo and then a duo, and then I start moving. That was the most proud I've ever been on stage, and the most like myself. I loved being able to shut down my eyes and focus on smaller things as well. And I guess in ballet, you're always told not to do that, but it just felt so comfortable for me to just be on stage and just to start like that as well, and to just be more in tune with myself and then bring in the awareness of other people.

Tabitha detailed a similar experience of flow state (Csíkszentmihályi & Nakamura, 2014), to Abigail, with both dancers feeling an inner calm and focus, yet complete awareness of everyone and everything transpiring around them. Tabitha explained that this particular work was made under a limited timeline, and was not created or structured sequentially, which meant that quite often she felt her brain was at capacity. However, she felt the environment facilitated by the choreographer encouraged trust and respect and fostered the dancers' unique strengths within the creative process, which for her, was motivating and meant she could relax into her creativity. During flow, a person's "attention is freely invested" (Csíkszentmihályi,1990, p. 3), and according to Amabile (2017) such a behavioural state is when "creative breakthroughs" (p. 6) can happen. Tabitha noted that generally when she feels in flow, she can generate material more efficiently, and that for her, this is an optimal experience of creative confidence during a choreographic process.

Laura described a choreographic process in which her confidence grew as her working relationship with the choreographer developed. She reflected upon it as a unique situation because the choreographer had very clear artistic and technical expectations for the material, yet there were particular moments when the choreography was to be improvised by Laura. She shared,

> I remember him giving me clear instructions about the way to approach the movement. He was explaining to me how it needed to be very exacting and how I needed to be demonstrating a sort of control over the movement, even though it was completely improvised, he was inspirational. I felt [that I was] in a partnership.

Laura's acknowledgment that she felt she was in a "partnership" with the choreographer suggests that she was a "delegated prosumer" (Foster-Sproull, 2017, p. 52) within the working choreographic

relationship, because she was "empowered to consume the choreographer's overarching direction for the dance work and [was] delegated a role to create artistic creative material through improvising" (Foster-Sproull, 2017, p. 50). In this experience of Laura's, the choreographic direction she received was provided clearly and respectfully, which provided her with confidence, and still allowed for her own creative interpretation and input. For Laura, having the combination of the choreographer's expectation in how she was to execute the movement, coupled with the choreographic improvisation she was to generate during this section of the work, provided her with an optimal experience of creative confidence. This suggests Laura's optimal choreographic process experience may be found when she works with the choreographer, together as a team, because being the "delegated prosumer" (Foster-Sproull, 2017, p. 52) provides her with high levels of creative confidence.

Abigail's experience differed from those of Ariana, Rhiannon, and Laura in terms of the reliance on a choreographer to create environments where creative confidence might emerge. Abigail explained that she held a strong sense of self-confidence which was able to carry her through creative processes and roles. Further, Abigail noted her preference for soloist roles because she was able to sit more comfortably within her individual artistry, which aided her sense of creative confidence rather than working with a group to create collective confidence. That said, Rogers (1969) and Csíkszentmihályi (2014) have both emphasised the potential for an individual's relationships to foster creativity. Similarly, Abigail also noted that she felt her collaborative choreographic experiences had been "the best" because it was possible to have some "back and forth" between herself and the choreographer. Therefore, Abigail's experience might be interpreted as optimal.

Baron's (2020) research suggests that "dancers need to feel confident and capable in rehearsals" (p. 82). From the participants' comments it appears that dancers may seek opportunities to step outside their comfort zones and to be vulnerable and rely on their own artistry and creativity but may find it challenging to feel confident enough to do so. Dancers' may engage with creative opportunities more confidently when they feel safe and supported (Knox, 2013), which can be connected to their levels of self-esteem. Therefore, it may be worth considering that the promotion and encouragement of dancer-confidence can also stem from dancers' going beyond their comfort zones, which is likewise in direct correlation to self-esteem (Ryan & Deci, 1995).

Tabitha described her experiences of generating and contributing movement from a creatively confident place, contrasting with the perspectives of Rhiannon, Laura, Abigail and Ariana. For Tabitha, freelancing has allowed her creativity to thrive (Hopper et al., 2020). She explained this is because being hired for jobs means that "they just hire me, they hire 'Tabitha', they give me a job and they just say, oh, yeah, she can do this.". Tabitha explained that by gaining these freelance opportunities where she can, "just turn up as [her]self", has aided her sense of creative confidence

because she feels appreciated for the skills she already possesses, rather than needing to conform to an already established ideal or institution (Clements & Nordin-Bates, 2022). Tabitha highlighted the connection between the character traits she holds outside of the dance studio as a "human" and the way she works inside a choreographic environment,

> As a human, I'm very independent, and I love doing things for myself, and freelancing works really well for me because I would much rather create something myself or ask for something that's come from my own head than wait to be told to do something.

Tabitha's acknowledgement of her ability to ask for creative input aligned with a general confidence she has gained within herself. She noted how utilising this within choreographic processes elevated her sense of confidence even more because her creative input was valued. The dynamic interactions between Tabitha and some of the choreographers she worked closely with involved high levels of trust, further contributing to her rise in creative confidence (Kelley & Kelley, 2012).

Considering all participants' experiences of creative confidence (Kelley & Kelley, 2012) as optimal experiences (Csikszentmihályi, 2014), I was curious as to whether ballet dancers feel that when there are opportunities for autonomy within technical and artistic choreographic elements, they are reliant on choreographers' actions to instigate those autonomous moments. It also drew me to consider where there may be opportunities for dancers to take more initiative and create autonomy themselves (Knox, 2019), if they desire. How can opportunities for decision making artistically and technically feed a dancer's motivation and creative confidence? How might trust be present within choreographic processes so that an optimal experience of confidence can occur?

4.2.4 The Challenge-skill Balance Enhancing Creative Confidence
All the participants' experiences indicate that the presence of a challenge-skill balance (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990, 2014) might be vital in choreographic processes to help generate creatively confident optimal experiences. This section highlights the diverse experiences the dancers within this research have identified as vital elements for challenge-skill balance to occur. It is important to note that Csíkszentmihályi (1990) indicates that challenge-skill balance is a prerequisite for achieving flow state, a concept which has been further substantiated by Nakamura and Csíkszentmihályi's (2014) research. However, within the context of this research, which is specifically through a ballet dancer's lens, it seems of value to consider challenge-skill balance as an amalgamation of the physical challenges of the choreographic work and the interpersonal interactions occurring in dancer-choreographer relationships which may enhance creative confidence. Drawing from the participants' narratives, it is important to acknowledge that flow state may or may not arise during these challenge-

skill experiences, and that this did not affect whether the dancers had experiences which they described as optimal.

Considering the challenge-skill balance (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990, 2014) through a dancer's lens within a choreographic environment (Foster-Sproull, 2017), Rhiannon and Ariana identify how it may be achieved in a group of dancers, such as the corps de ballet (Homans, 2013). They suggested that with a group of dancers, the choreographic challenge of skill might become more about technical execution as a group, especially if the choreographer has a clear vision for what they expect it should look like. This could be understood as using an extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2012) to drive the challenge to skill ratio for the dancers, and also providing a challenge-skill opportunity for everyone, as the dancers are aiming to achieve technical execution as a group (Fink & Woschnjak, 2011). Drawing connection to creative confidence within a group setting, Rhiannon and Ariana commented that this was sometimes easier to achieve, as the stakes were lower than when performing a solo. However, they also suggested there was less opportunity to contribute creatively in group dances where the choreographic intention is the precision of the steps, rather than the creativity of the steps.

Laura's reflections on challenge-skill balance (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014) provided an additional perspective to those of Ariana and Rhiannon. Laura reminisced about a time when she was 18 years old and in her first contracted professional employment with a ballet company. After only months in the company, she was moved up to the second cast of a new choreographic work, to replace a dancer who was being demoted from that cast. As a general comment, Laura noted that although it was exciting for her, due to the hierarchical constructs within a ballet company (Homans, 2013; Kelman, 2000; Wulff, 2008), she was aware that the dancer she was replacing was experiencing the opposite transition to her. Despite experiencing conflicting feelings, Laura knew that this was an opportunity for her to step into a role that would not usually be given to a new company dancer. Speaking of herself as "little 18-year-old Laura," she expressed, "I really just had to rise to the occasion and decide that I was ready to show up, and be able to communicate what I [had] to share as an artist at that time.". Laura explained that this particular role was being created on one of the principal dancers in the company, so for Laura, being 'thrown' into the second cast of that principal dancer's role at 18 years old was an honour and a challenge. I was curious how Laura navigated her confidence in the situation, and how this impacted her creatively, especially as she noted that the dancer the role was made for was someone she looked up to. She remarked,

> I just seem to remember watching the process unfold, watching it be created and just
> being mesmerized thinking, wow, what a beautiful situation. What a beautiful dancer,
> what a beautiful piece of art that's being created on her.

In our discussion, Laura highlighted that the choreographer was a vital person in this particular creative process because they were adamant that she never try to make the movements look like the other dancer performing the role. Having the choreographer facilitate rehearsals in such a way meant that her creative confidence was supported, and she was encouraged to bring herself into the role, rather than conform to how the work was created. She explained that the choreographer facilitated the entire process in a way that "encouraged everyone to express what they had to share with so much love and support and inspiration", which created optimal conditions which had a lasting impact on her career. For Laura, through this experience, the knowledge that she had skill and capability in challenging spaces, both artistically and technically, boosted her own self-esteem and confidence in what she had to offer, which was a pivotal moment in scaffolding her creative confidence for the future. Ariana's experiences align with Laura's, highlighting how facilitating an environment specific to the people or technical and artistic goals within the choreography impacts a dancer's self-esteem (Kim et al., 2022). Ariana described a choreographer that pushed and challenged her, yet had "a lot of consideration for what works for me, what shows off my strengths and my skills, was really nice, and when I was putting it on stage that I felt really confident". Ariana further explained that not only was she confident, but that she had felt creatively fulfilled during this choreographic process. Here, the choreographer had exemplified a challenge-skill balance by considering what worked for Ariana, aligning her strengths and her skill level, alongside some challenges throughout the choreography. This resulted in Ariana's confidence to artistically contribute to the work, whilst finding a harmonious state between her abilities and the demands of the movements, without feeling concerned she was out of her depth. The chorographer had simultaneously challenged and supported Ariana during this creative process.

A choreographer's support and encouragement can result in optimal experiences for dancers (Baron, 2020) if that choreographer provides a sense that they are making the most of the dancer's abilities, and the dancers feel they are acquiring new knowledge (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014; Foster-Sproull, 2017; Knox, 2013). Ariana's experiences highlight how creative confidence can occur within parts of a choreographic process beyond generating movement and contributing new ideas, but also within the work towards performing on stage. Laura's experience at such a young age challenged her artistic and technical skills. She described how the challenge of stepping into a principal role in a supportive environment affected her sense of motivation, leading her to gain new knowledge of her abilities, alongside building her self-esteem (Maslow, 1979). Therefore, it may be worth considering what a choreographer's relational approach is in facilitating an environment specific to the people, or the technical and artistic goals within the choreography (Gardner, 2007; Newall & Fortin, 2012), if providing a challenge-skill based approach is sought-after, as this may also impact dancers' sense of self-esteem.

Knox (2013) identified that there appears to be a difference in the physical and artistic challenges which can inherently impact dancers' self-esteem (Maslow, 1943) and overall dancer-confidence in the creative environment. Relating to this, Rhiannon's thoughts on creative confidence and optimal experience reflected different elements of those of Ariana and Laura. Rhiannon felt that overall, the challenge of complex choreographic movement which pushes her skills keeps her most motivated and engaged, and confident in what she needs to achieve. "I do really like challenge, and movement that is complicated really stimulates me and really keeps me engaged because I want to get it right.". Rhiannon's choice of word, wanting to get it "right", had me questioning whether getting it "right" was based on her terms or the choreographer's. Challenge can be considered a subjective term, which made me ponder if there could ever be a point for Rhiannon where being provided with what she considered as a challenge could become too much. She explained that technically and artistically she could never reach that point but, creatively, a challenge could on occasion feel a little overwhelming.

As a general reflection on her choreographic experiences, Rhiannon described how some of her choreographers were able to challenge the skill set she already possessed, pushing her artistic and technical range further. She explained,

> I've worked with choreographers who have challenged me to draw out different parts of me. I've worked with choreographers that have really asked for me to go inwards and enjoy the movement. And then I've had choreographers who have asked me to project the movement and project what they are asking of me.

Rhiannon also noted that how she was able to be challenged would depend on whether it would be a solo or group moment in the choreography, and that she enjoyed the shifts and changes this could bring to a choreographic process. Further, she felt that generally, if she is in a group role, she finds herself having to "connect more with [the choreographer's] intention" because she has less creative license, but does not mind, as her creative side still feels fulfilled while she is focusing on executing the steps, and she feels more confident in this part of the process. Roche (2011) has explained that group choreography does not "intrinsically impose distance between the choreographer's role and the bodies of the other dancers" (p. 63), as opposed to solo choreography where the choreographer's role can sometimes be solely focused on their body and movements, without the need to consider the coordination and interaction with other dancers. For Rhiannon, when she is rehearsing or creating a solo piece of choreography, she feels as though she can add more nuance to a role, and that the challenge becomes how she can make it more individual, helping her confidence within the creative contributions. Additionally, Rhiannon made a distinction in the dynamics between group and individual choreographic facilitation which provide her with enough rigour to challenge her skills, whereas Ariana placed more weight on the relational interaction which occurred for her to tackle the

challenges with her skills. Yet, both Ariana and Rhiannon highlighted the fulfilment and sense of progression the recognition of their skill-strengths provided them with, as well as the creative confidence they felt when an encouraging environment was facilitated by the choreographer.

According to Maslow (1943) and Deci & Ryan (1995), self-esteem levels may rise when a person feels fulfilled, which can also provide opportunities for a person to achieve 'peak performance'. Within the context of this research, in connection to Nakamura and Csíkszentmihályi's (2014) articulation of optimal experience, and Baron's (2020) perspective on optimal experience through a dancers' lens, it may also be of value to consider the direct correlation between challenge-skill balance and self-esteem, and therefore overall creative confidence, which may come from feeling a sense of fulfilment. Laura, Ariana, and Rhiannon's experiences highlight some range in sources of challenge-skill balance to provide an optimal experience (Nakamura & Csíkszentmihályi, 2014). However, the participants' experiences can be considered optimal because they were working at a level of "peak performance" (Baron, 2020, p. 29) and acknowledged feeling creatively confident.

At a dancer's peak they may be in a state where they are being challenged enough to step outside their comfort zone but not so much that they feel out of control (Foster-Sproull, 2017). The challenge-skill balance appears to have an impact on a dancer's sense of creative confidence, when a choreographer facilitates a process which involves challenging dancers' skills effectively, as proposed by both Nordin-Bates (2020) and Fink & Woschnjak (2011). Further, whether the process is undertaken in a group or solo setting, or in a technically or artistically difficult way, finding the balance of challenge and skill may create a sense of empowerment and confidence in the dancers' abilities.

4.3 Summative Analysis of Dancers Experiences of Creative Confidence Within Choreographic Practice in Professional Ballet Environments

Chapter 4 has provided a discussion and analysis of the participants' experiences of choreographic relationships (Knox, 2013) and creative confidence (Kelley & Kelley, 2012). By situating professional ballet dancers with equal importance to choreographers within creative processes, I have endeavoured to explore the participants' narratives to gain deeper insight into BDCCC. The following sections summarise the approaches and key findings from participant experiences.

4.3.1 Participant Experiences

The participant interviews raised diverse responses around choreographic approach, relationships, meaning, and personal preference in the construction of new ballet works. Their experiences suggested that attaining creative confidence within choreographic processes is complex, and that a choreographer's facilitation and communication practices can 'make or break' a dancer's self-esteem during the creative process. Examples suggest that dancers' preferences for choreographic facilitation

for best engaging with creative confidence (Kelley & Kelley, 2012), as well as for levels of collaboration (Knox, 2013), particularly within the movement-generation (Foster-Sproull, 2017) phase of the choreographic process, range on a scale of didactic to democratic (Butterworth, 2004).

Tabitha appreciated being valued as a collaborator and recognised for her creative input, explaining that collaboration means there is support between dancer and choreographer within the creative process and relationship, as this would most support her creative contribution to thrive. Laura valued when there was clearly initiated choreographic direction, as well as being recognised as a collaborator. This means she prefers a choreographer who provides detailed instructions for movement-generation, or technical and artistic requirements, yet leaves space for the dancer's interpretation.

Abigail's preference was to be valued as a collaborator during the process, but not acknowledged for creative contribution. Having guidance by the choreographer within hierarchy, without ownership over material she produced, gave her more confidence to creatively generate movement for a choreographer. Ariana had always been curious about creating choreographic material, but felt she lacked confidence when a process required it. Working directly with a choreographer to make material and collaboratively while in a hierarchical relationship, meant Ariana could creatively translate material in her own body. Rhiannon most appreciated processes with clear choreographic direction, in a hierarchy with the choreographer placed above dancer. She explained she felt she could best contribute creatively through artistic interpretation only, not by generating material.

Aside from dancers being invited, either explicitly or implicitly, to utilise their personal experiences as a starting point for their creative explorations, it seems that the dancers cannot help but create in a way that utilises their unique characteristics, the two appear inherently intertwined. Rogers (1961) concurred, asserting that "creativity always has the stamp of the individual upon its product" (p. 349), and Dollinger et al. (2005) have asked whether "creativity and identity are empirically related?" (p. 316), suggesting that identity can also influence creativity, just as experiences do. Therefore, a dancer's personal beliefs, cultural background, social context, and self-perception may shape the scope and direction of their creative endeavours if they draw inspiration from their identity-related experiences. A Ballet-Dancer-Centred Creative Confidence would value the entire individual and the lived experiences they bring into a choreographic space, acknowledging the empirical influence that identity upon a ballet-dancer, the confidence, and therefore their creativity. It appears that the dancers who participated in this research were wanting to connect creative processes more to their identities and, at times, more than they are consciously aware. Despite the range of preferences for choreographic facilitation described by each of the participants, all expressed their desires to be understood, respected, and cared for as human beings (Clements & Nordin-Bates, 2022). Tabitha,

Rhiannon, Ariana, Abigail and Laura all acknowledged the impact that a choreographic relationship which encompasses this has on their self-esteem, and therefore their creative confidence.

4.3.2 Chapter Summary

This chapter has drawn upon participant experiences and has explored key topics such as trust, validation, vulnerability, and motivation within the context of ballet and choreographic practice. The research has located these key themes within the relational hierarchy of a professional ballet environment (Alterowitz, 2014; Homans, 2013; Wainwright et al., 2006;), and discussed their positioning within Ballet-Dancer-Centred Creative Confidence. Overall, this chapter has highlighted the participants' experiences within the main themes of choreographic practice, relationships and creative confidence, and brought to light how dancer-choreographer relationships can impact the levels of optimal experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014), and self-esteem (Maslow, 1943), and therefore a ballet dancer's overall levels of creative confidence.

Further, the research advocates for the diverse range of experiences and needs highlighted by the dancers who participated, and describes the conditions necessary to achieve BDCCC. This approach seeks to prioritise the needs and experiences of ballet dancers during the choreographic process, and to create an environment that is supportive of their creative contributions both physically and emotionally. This chapter has highlighted the importance of creatively confident relationships within choreographic practice, and the participants' experiences have offered valuable insights into how the key themes can be nurtured in a professional ballet environment so that BDCCC can be fostered.

The discussion and analysis have challenged the notion that professional ballet dancers are conditioned to be voiceless (Claid, 2006) about their needs within choreographic environments. Through advocating for the diverse range of experiences and needs identified by the dancers in this research, this study not only highlights but also suggests some necessary conditions required in order to achieve BDCCC.

Chapter 5: Conclusion—Ballet-Dancer-Centred Creative Confidence

This research has proposed the notion of ballet-dancer-centred creative confidence (BDCCC). This paradigm encompasses ballet dancers' sense of creative confidence, placing it at the forefront of choreographic processes. A BDCCC choreographic process can be achieved by disentangling power within the dancer-choreographer relationship to provide levels of care which can be present within the creative process. BDCCC combines the key theories of dancer-centredness (Knox, 2013) and creative confidence (Kelley & Kelley, 2012), and applies them to choreographic processes within professional ballet environments.

I wish to draw attention to the quote, "As is our confidence, as is our capacity" (Hazlitt, 1903), and its relevance to BDCCC, even though Hazlitt's (1903) words are not from our current time or context. Firstly, it feels important to acknowledge that professional ballet dancing is a performance-based career (Kim et al., 2022), and thereby the preparation and process leading a dancer to being on stage can have profound impact on their performance (Kim, Tasker & Shen, 2022). BDCCC is specific to the generating element of choreographic composition, this is the preparation and process prior to performance. All the participants within this research project noted that when they experienced a process they were able to feel confident in, their capacity to transfer their confidence onto the stage was significantly elevated. That is why Ballet-Dancer-Centred Creative Confidence matters. BDCCC impacts dancers' performance beyond the choreographic process of creating a new ballet, and further into myriad avenues of their professional, and personal, pursuits.

5.1 Summary of the Research

This research was undertaken through qualitative, postpositivist (Krauss, 2015; Ryan, 2006), ethnographic (Carter & O'Shea, 2010; Frosch, 1999), and grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) research involving interviews with five professional ballet dancers who have worked in Aotearoa New Zealand. While acknowledging the internal workings of professional ballet environments (Nordin-Bates, 2020), themes of dancer-centredness (Knox, 2013), creative confidence (Kelley & Kelley, 2012), relationships of power (Foucault, 1980), and optimal experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014) are unpacked and located within the specific context of ballet. This study also drew upon my experiences as the researcher, as both an intimate insider and an insider outsider to interpret the participants' experiences. I undertook two 1-hour semi-structured interviews with five professional ballet dancers, within which we specifically delved into the following areas: tasking, interactions, creativity, and power. These discussions have evolved into re-visioning choreographic processes and relationships within the professional ballet dancing context, culminating in support for the proposed concept of improved BDCCC. This thesis provides an opportunity to view the ballet dancer's experiences deeply, from a variety of diverse perspectives. The following sections encompass the research findings, reflect upon the research journey, and pose additional questions for future research.

5.2 Key Discoveries

This research has revealed that each ballet dancer can hold many different perspectives. In turn, this has resulted in a range of understandings of what is possible or desirable within choreographic processes. Key discoveries which have emerged around BDCCC are:

- Ballet dancers want to be valued for both their physical abilities and their emotional intellect
- A BDCCC environment may tend to dancers' diverse perspectives based within dancer-choreographer respect
- The key conditions for a creatively confident relationship between dancer and choreographer can involve choreographer-initiated communication, organically occurring dancer-choreographer communications, and dancer-initiated communication.

The following sections discuss the key findings that contribute to an understanding of the potentials of BDCCC.

5.3 Dancers Value Having a Choreographic Relationship

As discussed, a key element of dancer-centredness is maintaining a holistic perspective and approach to the body (Knox, 2013; 2018), with the understanding that dancers are more than the physical aesthetics and articulations of their bodies. This concept has been at the forefront of my research into BDCCC, considering the 'human' first: a value shared mutually with all five of the participants. When choreographers showed interest in getting to know dancers beyond the dance studio or rehearsal environment, it made the dancers feel like humans, like people, rather than pieces of a choreographic puzzle. A deepened choreographic relationship made the dancers feel that their emotional intelligence was also valued. Further, they felt this built trust and care in the relationship, which meant that inside the dance studio they could be vulnerable, if necessary, within the creative process (Petrides et al., 2006). When the dancers felt comfortable to be vulnerable, they felt confident in the creative environment.

With consideration for BDCCC, the dancers who preferred a more didactic approach, and those who preferred a democratic environment (Butterworth, 2004) all valued the occasions when a choreographer considered what personal strengths the dancers could bring to the table. This appeared to boost self-esteem and confidence (Maslow, 1979; Ryan & Deci, 2020) in the dancers, regardless of whether they considered themselves as creatively confident people. The dancers noted that trust had the most impact on their creative confidence when tasking or generating movement as part of a choreographic process. Therefore, having conversations that trigger opportunities for dancers to share narratives, experiences, or information about themselves with a choreographer allows dancers to demonstrate their value beyond their bodies. These generative creative relationships impact upon ballet-dancers' creative confidence.

5.4 Mutual Respect is Important in Developing Ballet-Dancer-Centred Creative Confidence

The second key finding in this research highlights that BDCCC can attend to the diversity of a ballet dancer's wants and needs during choreographic processes, utilising respect in many modalities. All the participants in this study have noted the importance they place upon feeling respected by the choreographer. However, they have stated that this can be shown through different dynamic interactions in the dancer-choreographer relationship, all of which aid in building ballet dancers' creative confidence. The broad nature, yet unmistakeable presence of respect, is described below, from each of the dancers' perspectives.

Firstly, when a dancer is shown respect by being valued as a collaborator for their creative input and opportunities to freely create movement, it can help streamline the process. For example, Tabitha described such a moment, saying "It was just that complete trust, trust in what I brought to the piece. It means you can focus on what's important." This suggests that a collaborative approach in dance-making can foster mutual respect between dancers and choreographers, leading to a more fulfilling, focused, and productive creative process. Expanding upon Tabitha's comment, when dancers feel trusted and empowered to bring their unique perspectives and ideas to the work, they are also more likely to produce their best work (Knox, 2019; Mattingly & Young, 2020). This collaborative approach emphasises mutual respect and clear communication, which are crucial elements for successful dance-making.

Next, the following describes when a dancer is shown respect through clearly initiated choreographic direction whilst being recognised and valued as a collaborator when creating movement. Laura noted a moment when this occurred for her during a creative process, noting that the choreographer "described it [the movement] needed to be very exacting, even though it was completely improvised. I felt in a partnership." This suggests that effective communication may be key to a successful collaboration and partnership between dancers and choreographers (Mattingly & Young, 2020). When the choreographer communicates their vision clearly, it enables the dancers to contribute effectively to the creative process. And, as Laura mentioned, this approach fosters a sense of partnership between the choreographer and the dancers, leading to a more engaged and motivated environment.

In a situation where a dancer is shown respect by being valued as a collaborator, despite having no ownership over the created material, yet still being guided by hierarchical choreographic direction, Abigail explained, "[the choreographer] needs to have a set plan with what they're trying to express. That gives something for the dancers to work towards." In this approach, the choreographer sets the direction for the work while still valuing the dancers' contributions to the creative process. According to Newall & Fortin (2012) this approach emphasises the importance of collaboration and mutual

respect while ensuring that the work aligns with the choreographer's vision (Foster-Sproull, 2023). The dancers are given specific directions to follow, but they are also allowed to bring their unique skills and ideas to the work, providing a sense that their input is also valued.

Similarly, Ariana described how a dancer can be shown respect through a clear hierarchical relationship with choreographic direction, while also being given opportunities to develop movement together with the choreographer. Ariana stated, "I really liked…when the choreographer was able to get us on the same page, understanding what they wanted.". Expanding on this point with Ariana, we discussed a clear vision from the choreographer combined with opportunities for dancers to develop movement together can create a productive and respectful collaboration without feeling overwhelmed (Nordin-Bates, 2020; Pouillaude, 2017). This approach again fosters a sense of partnership between the choreographer and the dancers while ensuring that the work aligns with the choreographer's vision.

Finally, the following describes a situation when a dancer was shown respect by having a clear hierarchical relationship with the choreographer, with clear choreographic direction and no movement creation required. Rhiannon explained, "I feel more confident and I enjoy more, interpreting other people's skills, I find it hard when there's no hierarchy." In this approach, the choreographer has a clear vision for the work, giving the dancers specific artistic and technical directions to follow. Following Rhiannon's description, this approach again emphasises the importance of clear communication and mutual respect (Morris, 2008), ensuring that the work is performed in a cohesive and compelling manner. While the dancers are not given the opportunity to create movement, they are still valued for their artistic and technical skill and ability to interpret the choreographer's vision.

The participants narratives in this study have directly identified the connection between respect and BDCCC through dancers' and choreographers' interactions during the creative process. These dancers' experiences highlight that when they feel respected and valued as collaborators, they are more confident in their creative abilities and, in most cases, able to contribute creative ideas. As identified, the dancers' needs range from a clear hierarchical relationship with choreographic direction, with varying levels of collaboration and movement-creation opportunities, to a more collegial relationship with a sense of equal power in the relationship. Engaging and motivating environments can lead to a cohesive performance, where mutual respect and clear effective communication are crucial elements for a successful dance-making process.

5.5 Conditions for a Creatively Confident Dancer-Choreographer Relationship
This research into BDCCC has discovered that the relationship built and maintained between dancers and choreographers has a significant impact on dancers' creative confidence levels. The following

section identifies the key conditions for a creatively confident dancer-choreographer relationship. These conditions centre around choreographer-initiated communication, organically occurring dancer-choreographer communications, and dancer-initiated communication. Finally, the section summarises ways in which dancers may optimise creative confidence.

Choreographers who initiate communication with dancers by providing encouragement, affirmation, and validation for their work can significantly impact dancers' self-esteem and confidence levels, even when a choreographer's feedback may be paired with criticism. The dancers in this investigation felt valued within a supportive rehearsal environment and concluded that constructive criticism provided them with opportunities to improve, but that acknowledgments from the choreographer for their efforts significantly motivated them. The dancers were more likely to engage creatively and confidently with the choreographer and the process, even if they might not be naturally inclined to.

In addition to choreographer-initiated communication, organically occurring communication between dancers and choreographers is also critical to the cultivation of creative confidence. For the dancers, having relaxed conversations, opportunities to ask questions, and explanations as to why they might be expected to do movements in particular ways created feelings of respect in the relationship, because it placed a sense of meaning into the movements. With opportunities to communicate back and forth, such an approach made the dancers feel more confident to initiate communication with choreographers and provided understanding of the collaboration involved within different processes.

Across the board, all the dancers who participated in this study were able to separate feelings of enjoyment in creatively contributing to a choreographic process and their levels of confidence when generating ideas or choreographic material. When dancers felt comfortable to initiate communication with their choreographers, they noted that they felt most confident within the creative space. They were most likely to contribute creatively through movement generation, ideas, or artistic interpretation when they felt creative discussions could occur without judgement or admonishment from the choreographer. Their confidence levels were highest when they felt respected, whether the creative aspect was enjoyable or not.

In summary, the dancers' narratives highlighted the importance of communication in building creatively confident dancer-choreographer relationships. By providing encouragement, affirmation, and validation, into a BDCCC approach, choreographers can create supportive environments that motivate dancers and build their self-esteem and confidence. Organic communication that occurs between dancers and choreographers fosters respect and creates more open and collaborative environments. Finally, dancer-initiated communication enables dancers to feel confident in expressing themselves creatively in contribution to the creative process.

5.6 Recommendations for Practice and Future Research

This study has revealed a number of potentialities for practice and future research. This research has taken five female professional ballet dancers' experiences of choreographic practice and analysed the emergent themes of trust, validation, judgement, and motivation within creatively confident dancer-choreographer relationships. The following explores how the study might be considered within a BDCCC perspective, offering some suggestions for future research.

The concept of BDCCC is about the decision making during a choreographic process, not the product of the process. This means that dancers require the confidence to decide to contribute an idea, regardless of whether it will be received well or not. BDCCC approaches choreographic process with the intention to foster these abilities for ballet dancers.

BDCCC means that relationships which exist between dancers and choreographers value the dancers' contributions to a process, and that the contributions are respected and acknowledged, with the mutual understanding that the process may then be enhanced, or it may not. BDCCC does not rely on whether dancers and choreographers 'like' something. It relies on the ability to go forward with communications, contributions, movements and ideas during a choreographic process regardless of how the creative concepts may be received by others.

This research proposes BDCCC as a way forward for dismantling traditional hierarchical relationships within the professional ballet world and suggests how ways of communicating with and treating dancers may impact on a dancer's ability to optimise their experience (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014) of creative confidence. In response to the findings, it is recommended that a choreographer, where possible: provide dancers with the opportunity for artistic autonomy so that they can experiment and play with choreographic movement; create time and space to explore creative ideas; embody holistic respect; and endeavour to give clear, transparent communication. This approach may help dancers engage confidently and deeply with the creative process.

The scope of this study is broad, and the limitations of the word count have required decision-making around what can be addressed within this master's thesis. It is hoped that future scholarship will explore questions raised in this research. BDCCC identifies four key areas of importance within this research: ballet dancers, choreographic practices, creative relationships, and creative confidence. However, it acknowledges these all need further attention for future research into the complexity of dancer-choreographer relationships.

Of particular interest, another important theme which was discussed with participants, but could not be investigated further within the scope of this thesis, was ballet dancers' preprofessional training and

dance lineage, and the impact this may have on their professional experience. In future research, I would be curious as to how the rigorous training received during formative training years may serve as a foundation for dancers' creative confidence through the advancement of their technical proficiency, artistry, and physical endurance. The participants of this study also alluded to the teachers and choreographers they have been influenced by, and how they may have had greater exposure to a wider range of choreographic works and performance opportunities, providing them with more diverse and well-rounded professional experiences than other dancers.

Future research may also attend to the following: implications that gender-identification may have for dancer-choreographer relationships and interactions; dancers' cultural backgrounds, beliefs and perspectives, which may impact their approaches to and perspectives on ballet and choreography; and, subsequently, instigating research to give voice to choreographers and their perspectives on choreographic collaboration within the ballet dancer-choreographer paradigm.

Finally, it is acknowledged that the narratives and experiences within this study are from dancer perspectives. Future research conducted from choreographer perspectives would also be beneficial.

5.7 A Final Thought

Reflecting upon all five participants' experiences in relation to my own, I found a range of connections and resonances with each one of them.

Tabitha shared, "Just being hired for the whole package of me with how I move, how I think how I am in the space which people appreciate" made a world of difference for her own levels of creative confidence. Abigail highlighted how having a "voice" in creative spaces motivated her to engage with the choreographic material more deeply. Ariana discussed how being acknowledged for her strengths as a dancer added to her confidence and curiosity, especially within creative spaces. Laura acknowledged how much a choreographer's support, care and displays of trust in you as a dancer can empower your sense of trust within yourself. Rhiannon shared that a choreographer's interest in her as an individual beyond her body made her feel respected, valued, and more able to connect to choreographic works.

Tabitha, Laura, Ariana, Abigail and Rhiannon's stories have given voice to dancers' experiences, joys, and challenges with choreographic processes in ballet. They have shaped the way I now approach my own choreographic practice. As choreographers, we cannot make work without dancers and their technical, artistic, and emotional skills.

To all the dancers and choreographers—we are artists, yes, but we are humans first.

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