

**“Its all of me there, all of the time”:
Meanings and Experiences of a Holistic View of the Individual Within
Choreographic Collaboration**

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Introduction

Throughout my dance training and my career in professional contemporary dance, comments such as “you are a blank canvas” and “you should leave your problems at the door” were prevalent. Further, within my experience, the idea that a silent dancer equals a ‘good’ dancer is still asserted within New Zealand, and perpetuated within other contemporary dance contexts (Roche, 2011).

Problematizing these attitudes within collaborative dance-making relationships might make us understand that requesting dancers to bracket off aspects of their identity or to censor their creative behaviour might be counter to their creative engagement.

This research is driven by three key questions. First, how do dancers view themselves as holistic beings within choreographic collaborations? Second, how do dancers see they are perceived as holistic beings within dance-making? Third, what

might these ideas reveal about dancers' creative agency within choreographic collaboration? This research explores five professional contemporary dancers' experiences of choreographic collaboration, within the context of western concert dance, in New Zealand.

Whilst acknowledging the multitude of ways in which dance can be made (Butterworth, 2004), this research hones its focus specifically toward collaborative dance-making; whereby the choreographer engages the dancers as a team towards the creation of a dance work. This could specifically be through the offering of movement, or artistic ideas. Pertinently, it could also be proposed that all dance making is in some form collaborative. It is important to note however, that a collaborative approach to dance-making does not necessarily determine the nature of the relationship between dancer and choreographer, nor exactly how the collaborative journey might evolve from moment to moment within a dance-making process. Further, the choreographic journey might include a range of processes that lead towards performance, including, but not limited to: conceptualisation, improvisation, tasking, refining, structuring, rehearsing and cleaning the finalised dance work. This study chooses to respond to the stories the artists selected to explore in their interviews. Therefore, the processes of tasking, improvisation, and movement generation are a predominant focus.

Acknowledging the growing body of scholarship that explores the choreographer's role (Dance, 2006; Kampe, 2010; Lavender, 2006, 2009; Warburton, 2002) and dance-making relationships (Barbour, 2008; Butterworth 2004;

Gardner, 2004, 2007, 2011; Lakes, 2005; Newall and Fortin, 2012), little research has been found to focus specifically on dancers' experiences of dance-making (Arnold, 1998, 2000; Carter, 1998; Risner, 1995, 2000). However, where evident, it is suggested they provide valuable alternative perspectives to that of the choreographer's (Roche, 2011).

Broadly, agency may be understood as the ability of an individual to act independently (Hitlin & Elder, 2007). However, this research does not seek to define the term 'agency' but rather to engage a multitude of diverse creative experiences that may be interpreted as experiences of agency.

Within this study, as a way of seeking to understand dancers' experiences of agency, a person-centred lens is applied, engaging literature from the areas of education, leadership and psychology. Specifically, this paper focuses on viewing the dancer as a holistic being, as a key aspect of person-centred relationships (Rogers, 1961, 1969, 1977, 1980). Contextualised within choreographic practice, this 'dancer-centred' viewpoint presents an opportunity to explore how dancers might be encouraged to utilise their whole selves as a creative resource within choreographic collaboration. Subsequently, a dancer's agency could be posited as a 'dancer-centred' approach, enabling new understandings of the dancers' role (Knox, 2013).

Literature review: Creating a holistic view of the dancer

Foregrounded within person-centred relationships is a holistic view of the individual, encompassing self-actualization, autonomy, responsibility and decision-

making processes (Rogers, 1961). Person-centred relationships bring the personal to the heart of social interactions. However, it is important to note that a dancer-centred view does not seek to devalue the role of the choreographer, but rather highlight the value of the *people* involved. By placing a person holistically at the centre of a relationship such as that of the dancer/choreographer, we may see that what the entirety of the person brings to a situation may be larger and more definitive than a smaller part.

It may be seen within education that the student as a whole being is devalued by placing the emphasis primarily on the intellect (Freire, 1970). Within dance, the opposite may be the case: the dancer's physical ability is valued, while their intellect is neglected (Barbour, 2000). This has the potential to conflict with the opportunity for the dancer to discover the epistemology of the movement (Risner, 2000). In support of this, dancer Sarah Wildor noted, "If it [the choreography] makes sense to the dancer, then the audience will understand" (Risner, 1995, p. 97). Therefore, facilitating opportunities for dancers to engage in their own meaning making may be beneficial to the product created. This may mean allowing movement investigations to encompass intellectual, emotional and psychological engagement also, thus inviting the whole dancer into the process.

A psychology-based person-centred theory offers a supporting view. The client may be perceived as a partner in the research of themselves and their illness (Rogers, 1961). Equally, the dancer may utilize their own personal knowledge, experience and ideas to research and draw movement conclusions, in conjunction

with other collaborators, rather than being told by the choreographer exactly what to think and do, when, and how. Educational literature also aligns, suggesting a benefit of encouraging a holistic presence of each individual, including their personality, social skills, intellect, experiences and values, is that learning may be both more effective and retainable for the individual (Pillay, 2002). Furthermore, learner-centred pedagogical practices allow learning to become more meaningful for the student when there are “opportunities to satisfy their curiosity by finding sources that suit their interest and style” (Motschnig-Pitrik & Mallich, 2004, p. 179). When this notion is placed within the context of choreography, it may be seen that dancers can be expected to share aspects of their personal life to inform their choreographic material and artistic journey. Dancers may use the movement generation process (‘tasking’) to explore and illustrate their identities, as well as following personal curiosities. This particular step of the choreographic process may allow dancers “to create their own knowledge and value systems, as a tool in creating their worlds” (Connolly, 2003, p. 12). As creativity is key to the choreographic process, we might ask how dancers might feel choreographers facilitate space for themselves as well as the dancers to draw from their creative selves and allow the emergence of new possibilities; and how this might benefit all involved, as well as the dance product.

A connection can be drawn between a holistic view of the dancer and the dancer posited as agent in the literature of Arnold (1988, 2000). This however, poses an issue for discussion. Arnold (1988, 2000) distinguishes between active and passive dancers. First, problematizing this binary, we can assert that the

choreographic process is not clear cut in defining what it means to be active or passive within the collaborative choreographic processes. I propose that within the dance-making process dancers may need to negotiate myriad creative roles and in doing so, they may need to shift between passivity or activity as the moments within the collaboration may require. In considering the role of agency within these moments, this could allow dancers to actively relinquish control, for example to follow the choreographer's instructions. However, in doing this, they might recognize that they are essentially choosing agentic action, as they are still selecting when to 'be' what.

Returning to the connection between the holistic view of a dancer and their agency, through the dancer working 'actively', Arnold (1988) suggests this may cause the choreographer to perceive the dancer in a particular way. Active dancers are supposedly those who are "rational, imaginative, and contributive" (Arnold, 1988, p. 51). Arnold notes that the more the dancer engages, the more the dancer is understood and treated as an individual and perhaps, holistic, person, rather than an instrument. These ideas reveal pertinent questions for this research, such as how might dancers understand agency as a responsibility within collaborative working relationships? Additionally, under what circumstances might a 'passive' dancer choose not to use their agency, which is still in effect using their agency, and what might affect this decision?

Methodology: Dancing with design

This research looks for the meanings people make of their experiences. It is focused on analysing material gathered from interviews, in the form of experiences, feelings, and behaviours. Therefore, a qualitative paradigm, which “plays with words instead of numbers” (Lewis, 1997, p. 87), has been selected. By attending closely to the articulation of the dancers’ experiences, I focus on what they may describe or allude to rather than seeking concrete facts and figures. Further, the small number of participants has allowed for a flexible and deep investigation and meaning making process (Ryan, 2006) that responds personally to each individual. This celebrates both their epistemological subjectivities and socially constructed ontologies (Green & Stinson, 1999). Moreover, a qualitative approach offers the potential for multiple themes to emerge (Ryan, 2006). Thus, the qualitative approach pulls the focus of the research towards what is important and relevant to the dancers’ needs, as they stipulate.

Additionally, this study does not seek to define or prove a singular truth, but rather places attention on investigating the multiplicity of realities constructed by the dancers involved. A post-positivist paradigm is a useful way of viewing reality as socially constructed rather than an objective truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Within this research I seek to learn what is relevant to the particular context of contemporary dance and choreographic practice in New Zealand (Green & Stinson, 1999). As a consequence, I aim to build contextually relevant knowledge that comes from and supports dancers within their social environment of the dance studio. Further, post-positivist research recognizes that realities may be flawed, fallible and

can only be approximated (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). This view could be beneficial to recognize within this research, as attempting to gather, and weave multiple realities from within the same context, is not a straightforward process. Furthermore, contemporary dancers are working under artistic conditions that imply the presence of ambiguity and intuition. Therefore, the possibilities that these variables may offer to the research might be valued by the research methodology.

In viewing the numerous realities of the participants, my own 15 years of experience as a professional contemporary dancer inherently guides my voice as a dance researcher; adding another layer of truth to the research process. A post-positivist paradigm appreciates the presence of this truth as equally valid within the research (Ryan, 2006).

As this research explores the socially constructed culture of professional dance, ethnography was selected as a further methodological approach. Ethnography seeks understanding of the cultural climate of a particular community (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). In the case of this research, the 'where' being the dance studio, the 'what' being a choreographic process, and the 'who' being the dancers involved within this context. Further, an important aspect of ethnography is the necessity to view research material within the context it comes from (Frosch, 1999). I have continually attempted to view the research in a way that is specifically relevant to this group of dancers and take into consideration the contextual and historical factors present in this environment (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). As a result of this, the findings may prove to assist this community in continuing in a

sustainable way (Barbour, 2008) by assisting them to create meanings and understandings.

As dancers' experiences of dance-making were sought, semi-structured interviews were selected as the key method of data collection. Interviews aim to appreciate "what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions" (Weiss, 1995, p.1). Through the use of a Topic Guide, the dancers were prompted with areas for discussion that focussed on drawing out meaningful and pertinent experiences of agency and collaboration, from the initial stages of the choreographic process. Through this, diverse personal stories, perspectives and attitudes towards the choreographic process were gathered for the purpose of analysis through a person-centred lens.

The dancers within this research are: Sarah Foster, Georgie Goater, Anita Hunziker, Lucy Marinkovich, and Claire O'Neil. These practitioners were deemed appropriate research participants as each had between three to 20 years of professional experience of working with New Zealand's emerging and established choreographers, within diverse professional dance contexts. Each of the dancers completed conservatoire dance training in New Zealand and they are all still actively working within professional contemporary dance.

Given that dancers are involved as participants in this research, ethical issues have been addressed. Ethical approval for this research was gained from the

University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee prior to approaching potential research participants.

Discussion: “It’s all of me there, all of the time”: Holistic meanings and experiences

“The dancer is the me and I am the dancer, if I’m doing my job right, then it’s all of me there, all of the time” (Sarah).

As Sarah’s statement suggests, dancers may already perceive themselves holistically within the choreographic process. A holistic view can further be explained as valuing the entire person regardless of what the situation may value or emphasize. Within the context of dance-making, this might translate as seeing the dancer as a *person* who dances. It is perhaps pertinent to consider how being perceived holistically might mean more holistic experiences.

The research revealed several ways in which the dancers’ attitudes and experiences allude towards what ‘holistic’ might mean to them. These possibilities included being perceived as an individual, having the possibility for intellectual engagement, feeling as though they are a cohesive being, and exploring a self-responsive mode of working.

Holistic means: Being an individual

“What I have to offer is unique and important” (Sarah).

All five dancers stated that they are able to personally inform their creative contributions. This subsequently appeared to be a way of being recognized as an individual within the choreographic process, even when the surrounding dance-making context or choreographer might not explicitly acknowledge this. The nature of collaboration potentially highlights difference (Abra, 1994) as might western contemporary dance. Lucy agreed that individuality is important within dance-making. She explained, “Me as an artist is totally different to you as an artist, so what I make is going to be totally different to what you’d make, because I’ve come from a different wealth of experiences to you”. In agreement with this, Georgie explained of the movement generation process: “I’ve been given something [a task] and then my response can only come from *me*. [...] It’s *my* journey and *my* exploration and that is satisfying”. It might be interpreted that for Georgie, feeling like an individual, meaning that only *she* can create what she creates, allows her to feel a sense of empowerment and ownership. Sarah stated that within challenging moments of choreographic processes she reminds herself that, “What I have to offer is unique and important”. In placing the dancers’ statements alongside one another, it might be understood that having a point of difference allows the dancer to be appreciated for their own potentials, strengths and contributions. Additionally it may be that the dancers perceive this uniqueness to be advantageous, in that differences of identity are valuable and offer greater potential to the choreographic process. Anita appeared to support this by saying “The more options you have, the more options you present to them [the choreographer], it might open their mind a bit more”.

In positioning dance-making as an inherently social activity, individuals may learn to integrate themselves into socially constructed categories through social interactions. Within the context of the choreographic process it may be that as dancers are grouped together, they could subsequently feel that they are no longer unique. Drawing upon my own experience of choreographic processes, I offer that this feeling could be perpetuated by aspects of dance-making such as dancing in unison and being asked to execute the movement exactly the same as the other dancers. It could be that as a result of moments such as this, the dancers feel strongly about articulating the ways in which they are individuals.

Problematizing this within a dancer-centred paradigm, it has been asserted that by respecting each individual within a group, the group as a whole may become stronger (Plas, 1996). I offer that the shared goals and outcomes constructed within collaborative ways of working might provide a unity of intention. Within this, each individual might work towards these goals in their own way, achieving their own “outstanding best” (Plas, 1996, p. 81) through utilizing their own knowledge and strengths, thus, also offering a space for agentic action to be within the dancer’s grasp.

A further point drawn from the dancers’ understandings of what it means to be an individual is that collaborative working methods might inherently mean that the dancers are expected to offer unique contributions. Anita explained that she feels her role as a dancer is to be “a source of inspiration” for the choreographer. This might be evidenced in the movement generation stages (tasking process) of dance-

making. Each dancer spoke in depth about the tasking process and very little about other stages of rehearsal. From this, I gathered that ‘tasking’ itself offered something unique; and that this process could be perceived as essentially being about the dancer exploring their individuality and identity. Seeking to understand this, it could be that the dancers are carrying their personal bank of experiences with them into the choreographic process. They are then able to act as an agent to assert their uniqueness. It could be posited that dancers perceive a responsibility to supply many possibilities, one of which might be the ‘right’ one (Lucy).

Holistic means: Intellectual engagement

“There’s a curiosity [...] an actively intellectual engagement” (Sarah).

Each of the dancers placed importance on their intellectual engagement within the choreographic process. As Sarah suggests, this “curiosity” and active “intellectual engagement” may also reveal that the dancers perceive this to be essential in order for them to do their jobs effectively. Through Lucy’s interviews I sensed that she is able to assume an unquestioning position of intellectual engagement. It appeared that there was simply no other way for her. She communicated that as the choreographer explains a creative task, “I’ve already got pictures and images in my head, of other things that I think”. Georgie summed up her role as a collaborator as being “very much available as a creative mind as well as a technician”. From this I understood that Georgie perceives her role as someone who contributes to various facets of the choreographic process. She utilized the word

'technician' to explain the execution of her movement contributions, as only one aspect of her job as a dancer. She also appeared to believe her role involves contributing creatively and intellectually to the dance-making process. For all the dancers, it appeared to be extremely important, and preferable, to be able to engage in an intellectual and creative manner.

In comparison to the feeling of satisfaction that emanated from Georgie and Lucy of being able to easily engage intellectually, Sarah stated that a common experience for her in the past is the perception "that I am not privy to what I am actually doing intellectually through the work, from a choreographer's perspective". This leads to the idea that the choreographer might project a body/mind split onto the dancer. New Zealand dance scholar Karen Barbour (2000) similarly questioned the nature of this attitude as she recounts being told by a teacher to "stop intellectualizing" (p. 99) in a dance class. Further Barbour (2000) suggests that there may be some pedagogical practices that perpetuate the separation of body and mind. For example, dancers being asked to look identical as they execute movement might place more emphasis on the dancer's body, thus objectifying them (Green, 1999). This may or may not be intentional on behalf of the choreographer or a person watching.

In considering the ways that the dancers suggested the body/mind binary might be perpetuated, Anita stated, "someone is looking at you, looking at your body, the way you move, what you're contributing". From this we see the dancers are aware of a constant watchful gaze. This surveillance might include the dancer's

physical performance within the dance-making process but also implies an underlying behavioural compliance. In support of this, Dryburgh & Fortin (2010) suggest, “People under surveillance tend to internalize the surveilling gaze, modify their behaviour and question their identity in order to conform to a given social norm” (p. 96). Within the context of dance-making this could be seen to be true when the dancer’s statements regarding surveillance in this way are placed alongside their questions of how to ‘be’ or behave.

In further considering this split and reviewing Sarah’s statement, it might be understood that she feels choreographers may not only distinguish between her body and mind, but deem her mind to be inactive. In questioning this idea in relation to the authority of the choreographer’s position, Lakes (2005) points out that a dance leader can be both perceived as and claim that they are “infallible, all-knowing, and all-seeing” (p. 10). Claire’s suggestion that the choreographer is the focal point of the dance-making process might support this. Extending on this, it could be also that by combining the force of all of the dancers’ focuses being placed on the choreographer, a reflective gaze is produced. Thus, the power of the choreographer’s position may be multiplied. As a consequence, the distance between the group and the leader might also be extended.

From the perspective of the choreographer, as they survey the group, even if unconsciously, they may have the potential to begin to construct knowledge about the dancers. The importance of this may be that their perceptions may not align with the dancer’s experience. Townley (1998) supports this, suggesting, “Knowledge of

becomes knowledge *over*" (p. 203). This in turn might create greater power for the choreographer who could perceive that they possess knowledge of both the dance and the dancer.

Viewing a dancer's intellectual engagement through the person-centred lens, it is suggested that a leader telling a person what to do and how to do it, may have the potential to affect their personal learning process (Gilley, 2001). Additionally within a person-centred environment there may exist the possibility for a person to troubleshoot their own problems without needing to gain approval from an outside source (Nanney, 2004). In questioning why intellectualizing may be important to a dancer-centred experience, it might be seen as the first step of agency. Before acting, the agent may first consider and select an intention. To do this, they might survey the circumstances or structures surrounding them. Then a decision may be made as to which action to take. Considering why thinking might be essential to a dancer's experience, it has been suggested that dance is a way of making thought visible (Stevens & McKechnie, 2005). Additionally, perhaps within collaborative dance-making it could be the dancer's job to pursue this translation of thought to movement as they are invited to creatively contribute. Supporting this idea is the suggestion that to be a creative artist a dancer must engage in "mindful movement and creative inquiry" (Warburton, 2002, p. 119). From this, it could be proposed that creativity, collaboration and thought are integral to each other, and are experienced as agency.

Another understanding of why the dancers might perceive their intellectual engagement is important could be that they are seeking ways of being seen and acknowledged as artists in their own right. It may also be that from the dancers' perspectives, collaboration might offer this through the possibility of creative contribution. Additionally through the movement generation thought process they might be undertaking a similar intellectual process to that of the choreographer. The dancer's process may not, however, be as visibly or audibly evident. This may be dependent on whether the dancer chooses to or is invited to articulate this process. Returning to Arnold's (1988) notion of the 'active' dancer, he supports this idea in that it may be the intellectual processes that allow a dancer to be a creative agent. Arnold (1988) suggests that to do this, a dancer might be allowed opportunity to survey the potential of the dance-making procedures. They might then make decisions about how they will then transform 'possibilities' into choreographic actions. It could be proposed that through intellectual thought being allowed to be creatively evidenced within the dancers' contributions, this might subsequently allow the dancer to experience more empowerment and ownership of the dance product.

Holistic means: Feeling cohesive

"A good choreographer is someone who knows how to utilize individuals, and how to make that person a full-bodied individual" (Georgie).

Georgie's statement suggests she appreciates experiencing fullness, or a total presence of the self. Sarah's statement, "The dancer is the me and I am the

dancer, [...] it's all of me there all of the time" may also further illustrate the idea that the dancers wish to be fully present and acknowledged in their fullness within the dance-making process. However, emerging from this idea was that at times the dancers' felt they were not recognized as full or complete, or this feeling was difficult for them to manifest. A tension became apparent within the dancers' experiences in that they concerned themselves with negotiations to reconcile multiple 'parts' of themselves, as well as multiple external perceptions they felt were held of them. This kind of navigation was communicated as taking various forms, such as different "skillsets" (Georgie), different "people" (Sarah) or different ways to "be" (Anita, Claire). Anita noted, "You might know that a certain person might like you to be this way and this way only". She continued, saying that if she knew this about a choreographer she would "not bother trying" to be otherwise. Claire suggested, "We're like shape shifters, we have to move into different zones in order to understand someone". This shows a distinct knowledge of what a choreographer might expect or desire within their particular process, or a sense that this is a requirement of the dancer's role.

Reflecting upon these statements, two points arise. Firstly, Claire spoke of opening herself up towards what might be required by the choreographer, the process and the dance work; searching for how she might need to 'be'. More specifically, she suggested she is "listening" to "what is being artistically suggested". She further clarified how she responds to covert directions stating, "I'm not doing what they want me to do, it's just that I'm reading what is the temperament that

they're looking for". This alludes to the second point, that Claire has identified a process of "evolving" into what is required. There appears to be an active attempt to adjust herself or her approach to the process into what is needed, based on what she finds in her listening. This might imply a type of agentic submission, as well as a conscious shifting of the dancer's way of being.

From the dancers' experiences, a series of possible conflicts arose between the perceived movement identity or physical capabilities of the dancer and that which the dancer actually experiences. Sarah's expressed an unease with acting as a "vessel of movement replication", stating that she considers this perception to be a sort of artistic "death of your personality and your potential". She explained this in the following comment:

It means you have been hired to perform a set of things that the person perceives you to be capable of doing, so you've been defined already, and that person might not even imagine what you're capable of, and that's why it's a death.

What becomes apparent from the dancers' experiences, such as this from Sarah, is a lack of congruence between what the dancers felt was expected of them, either overtly or covertly, and their own ambition to explore their own physicality and creative process. Sarah stated that negotiating these perceptions feels like a "constant redefinition of who you are by other peoples' parameters" and that it is "exhausting".

Each dancer has worked with multiple choreographers with diverse creative demands. Georgie pondered the different skillsets she knew she needed to bring to each choreographer, noting “It’s weird to think about myself like that, like compartmentalizing myself almost.” She further noted that what she would bring would depend on what the objective or concepts were for the dance work, explaining that it felt “performative” to inhabit the different possible requirements. She added that this approach and the skillsets she chooses to employ are conscious decisions she makes because she believes in the choreographer’s work.

A further tension identified is that the dancers may be expressing a perception that along with knowing what to ‘be’, they might also know what not to be. As a result, they feel that parts of themselves are perhaps not valued within the dance-making context. I consider here how dancers are internally attempting to work within parameters such as this. I extend this by questioning, if congruence of ‘selves’ is also about “realness” (Rogers, 1980, p. 15) could the dancers be ‘faking’ it as they attempt to become what they perceive they are required to be? How does this then impact their experiences of agency within dance-making?

Considering this, viewing the dancer holistically may be a way of valuing them and their creative contributions. Within a business context, person-centred management is a way of allowing employees to be unique individuals, ensuring their contributions are fully facilitated and valued. Within this type of leadership system, the “contributions, involvement and loyalty of the employees [are placed] above those of the organization” (Gilley, 2001, p. 217). In doing this, the multiple ‘selves’ of

a person, may be united, valued and drawn from within the workplace (Plas, 1996). This again may promote congruency between the many roles a person might undertake in their lives.

Holistic means: Dancing a self-responsive identity

“I think your personal self informs what you do, [...] what you create is from you” (Lucy).

The dancers discussed several ways in which they respond to themselves within choreographic processes. Lucy illustrates that, within tasking, she is using herself as a resource to inform her creative contributions. Additionally, the dancers appeared to be attempting to acknowledge and respond to their physical, emotional or psychological state on any particular day of a choreographic process.

It emerged that the dancers perceive the choreographic process as a method of both exploring and asserting their artistic and personal identities. For example, Claire suggested this is “because you’re saying ‘I remember a time when I was really sick’ and you relate it to the concept [being explored in the process] [...], so you have these ideas and relationships coming from the ‘I’”. Similarly, Lucy suggested, “[I]t’s like you’re giving a little bit about yourself through movement”. At many moments throughout the interviews the dancers recognized that their contributions within creative processes “come from a personal place” (Georgie). This may mean the dancers’ approach to their role within dance-making is reiterating the idea that they are people dancing. The dancers expressed that their identity is inherent within both

their approach to the choreographic process itself and within any artistic contributions they made. This idea is supported by Arnold (2000) who notes that the dancer's sense of self and their artistic expression are perhaps inseparable and inform each other. Further, a definition of identity could be "an open-ended and self reflexive process of self formation" (Elliott & du Gay, 2009, p. xiv) and "people's source of meaning and experience" (Castells, 2004, p. 6). In this case, the choreographic process is an ideal context for the exploration of "identity building" (Fortin, Cyr & Tremblay, 2005, p. 18) and self-exploration in that the dancers are both creating and using their identity through their role in dance-making.

In considering how the dancers might be utilizing their identities as a creative resource, Lucy stated, "the root of anything you create is some form of reflection of yourself and your experiences". Additionally, Anita suggested that she should be "a source of inspiration". From these statements, we may understand that the dancers utilize themselves to benefit their own creative work, and that of the dance. This presents recognition from the dancers that they are fully present within what they do. The physical, historical, intellectual, experiential aspects of a person cannot be removed from what they create, and what they create is derived from who they are. Additionally, Lucy and Sarah both noted that through bringing everything with them to dance-making, they bring enough knowledge and skill within them already to do whatever is required of them, even if they must simultaneously work to grow and extend themselves.

Regardless of whether or not the dancers are invited explicitly or implicitly to utilize themselves as a resource within creative explorations, it seems that this is actually inherent within the dancers' creative experience. Aligning with this, Lucy conveyed, "It's got my personality all over it". Rogers (1961) concurs, asserting that "[C]reativity always has the stamp of the individual upon its product" (p. 349). Within this research it might appear that the dancers are connecting creative processes to their identities.

So what might the differences be that allow the dancers to identify and be identified as unique individuals within the choreographic process? Claire presented the idea of "moving towards yourself" as a performer, explaining that both artistry and honesty within contributions to choreography negotiate how close the dancer can become to what they really are. In a sense, it could be understood that the dancers are asking 'who they are', and are perhaps subsequently answering this through the creation of a dance. Claire further suggested that only by the performer knowing themselves can they move away from it and become something new to utilize within the creative process.

In considering the dancer's sense of self further, as dancers move from one choreographic process to the next, it may be that they have the potential to "disorganise" (Roche, 2011, p. 113) themselves and reconstruct a self that is suitable to their current dance environment. Similar ideas explored are "creative self-fashioning" (Fortin, Long & Lord, 2002, p. 171). From this, the question arises of how a dancer might choose to 'throw off' or attempt to undo experiences, comments,

mental states and reconstruct themselves anew for each new process. Additionally, challenges may arise when dancers are typecast or selected for possessing certain attributes that a choreographer wishes to work with. This raises questions of the ways in which a dancer may attempt to become personally or artistically available to a choreographer and how this might be viable and sustainable.

Conclusion: Ending scene

This research explored dancers' meanings and experiences of agency from a dancer-centred perspective, focusing on the dancers as a holistic being. It is revealed that this may have various meanings and subsequently allow different experiences of the dancers to emerge within collaborative choreographic processes. The dancers expressed strong connections and investigations of their sense of self, identity, and individualism. An important aspect of their involvement within dance-making appears to be their creative and intellectual engagement. It could be perceived that these particular modes of engagement, aside from the physical, reciprocally allow the dancers to explore and assert who they are as a person within the choreographic context.

The dancers' expressions of a holistic view communicated various ideas relating to self and identity. It could be perceived that this is connected to their search for self-actualizing experiences. Choreographic 'tasking' was a specifically identified process through which the dancers expressed many moments of agency. Tasking could be understood as the point at which they are offered agency and are

also able to manifest a feeling of agentic potential. I suggest that this could be because within tasking, the dancer is offered a potentially ambiguous framework to work with. Therefore, this may offer a large degree of freedom for the dancer to explore. The dancers appear to bring their own agendas to the tasking process and allow themselves to explore their own choreographic tangents. The tasking process was also explored as a way of the dancer to an individual. Rogers and Stevens (1967) suggest, "What each one of us does is important" (p. 268), and through the dancers expressing a desire to be acknowledged as unique, if even to themselves, they might begin to feel valued.

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