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"I wanted to be Darcey Bussell": Motivations and experiences of female dance-teachers

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Dance, analogous to professional sport, constitutes an interesting occupation in that there are relatively few vocations in which the athleticism of the body is inextricably linked to the ability to perform and teach. Dance-teachers could pursue teaching as a career as a way to remain involved in the physicality of dance to maintain a sense of self as a dancer. Dance-teachers make up a large proportion of the professional dance world in the United Kingdom and yet little is known about their role, training, continuing professional development and motivations to engage in a dance-teaching career. To address this lacuna, research was undertaken with ten female dance-teachers (24 to 71 years). Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, from which two key themes emerged as salient: (i) staying in dance; (ii) dance teaching as a career: challenges and skills. Pursuing a career in dance-teaching was viewed as a way to maintain a sense of self as a dancer. Participants who had been dance-performers appeared to view teaching as a natural career progression. The complex skills required of a dance-teacher were highlighted and participants positioned dance-teaching as a highly specialist career.

Dance, analogous to professional sport, constitutes an interesting occupation in that there are relatively few vocations in which "professional status is so inextricably dependent on the athleticism of the body and its continuous presentation in dramatic performance" (Turner & Wainwright, 2003, p. 275). This distinctive interconnection between athleticism and performance may act as a motivator to engage in a dance career that may solely or additionally incorporate dance teaching. One aspect of interest was the idea that female dance-teachers may pursue teaching as a career as a way to remain involved in the physicality of dance to act as a way to maintain a sense of self as a dancer. Whilst there are other careers in dance (e.g. choreography, directing), the majority of dance-teachers are female; dance teachers are four times as likely to be female than male (Risner, 2014). Given the high percentage of women as dance-teachers it is important to examine the role of female dance-teachers, dance-teacher training and continuing professional development. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the motivations of ten female dance-teachers pursuing a career as dance educators. The dance economy in the UK employs approximately 30,000 people, including dancers, teachers, choreographers, technicians and managers (Dance UK, 2015), a high proportion of which is comprised of dance-teachers. At the international level, the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD)[1] has more than 7,000 members in over 65 countries.

Once an individual has identified that s/he wishes to pursue a career in dance, s/he may be presented with what appears as a binary option of being a dance-performer or dance-teacher (Wilson, 2016). Such bifurcation has generated a hierarchy of dance careers with dance performing often considered of higher status than dance teaching, promoting the belief that "those who can, dance; those who can't, teach" (Moffett et al., 2015, p. 41). Recently, there has been a call to challenge this perception and amalgamate these roles into one of 'dance artist'. This would encompass the entirety of dance roles, including choreographer, director, researcher and technician, and define a successful career in dance as one of sustainable dance-related employment regardless of the form this takes (Bennett, 2009). This is especially pertinent given that dance-performance is a relatively short-term career and so much of a dance-performer's career will be spent in non-performing activities (Bennett, 2009). Two often reported reasons for taking up dance teaching include supplementing income and/or continuing a career in dance beyond the point when the physical condition of the body precludes dance-performance. Other rationales include stability of income, more sociable hours of work, reduction in

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[1]   The ISTD is a registered educational charity and membership association with a mission to educate the public in the art of dancing in all its forms, to promote knowledge of dance, to provide up-to-date techniques for its members, and to maintain and improve teaching standards. The ISTD supports its members through updated teaching syllabi and techniques, plus a wide variety of courses, summer schools and congresses.

travel, the desire to give something back to the dance world, and the joy of passing on knowledge and skills (Bennett, 2009; Sims & Erwin, 2012).

Dance-teacher identities are formed relationally with other dance-performers and dance-teachers (Andrzejewski, 2009). Dance-teacher identity encompasses three distinct but interrelated worlds: the dance-world, the teaching-world, and the world of the dance-teacher (Andrzejewski, 2009). The dancer and teacher identities may evolve separately, depending on a person's career trajectory. However, given that even for dance-performers, teaching is often an integral part of the job (for example, giving directions in rehearsals or as resident artists in a company) (Wilson, 2016), the identities of dancer and teacher often co-evolve in symbiosis. There can be occupational 'identity tensions' (Allen-Collinson, 2006), however, with dancers emphasizing 'body over mind' and teachers prioritising 'mind over body' (Andrzejewski, 2009). Dance-teacher training may reinforce such dualist conceptualizations when classes in dance and teaching are clearly demarcated.

Traditional methods of teaching dance, especially ballet, have focused on physical aspects such as dance steps and technique, with little emphasis on the emotional or spiritual aspects of the dancer that contribute to artistic development (Choi and Kim, 2015). Some literature on dance-teacher training has identified the need to deliver learner-centred approaches in teaching dance improvisation (e.g. Biasutti, 2013), to nurture creativity and reflective practice (e.g. Chappell, 2007; Tembrioti & Tsangaridou, 2014), and develop dancers holistically, with dance-teachers promoting values that include care, 'authenticity', and professionalism (e.g. Andrzejewski, 2009; Choi & Kim, 2015; Koff & Mistry, 2012). Dance pedagogy requires dance-teachers to engage in reflective practice. Whilst many tertiary institutions acknowledge the importance of this as an essential component of undergraduate dance-teacher training (Stevens & Huddy, 2016), Silva (2008) highlights potential disparities between students' reflective skills and the more advanced and sophisticated reflective ability needed to navigate the current UK workforce. Given the artistic and creative nature of teaching dance, encouraging reflective practice in teaching for creativity, within both initial dance-teacher training and continuing professional development, seems essential (Chappell, 2007). Little is known, however, about the continuing development of dance-teachers.

Until recently, much research in the area of dance-teacher training and development was relatively atheoretical. The Performance in Context Model (PCM), has, however been developed by Stevens and Huddy (2016), and identifies the need for mature, reflective, receptive and flexible approaches in dance-teaching. This model proposes a more holistic, collaborative approach to dance-teacher education: the marrying of 'teacher-as-artist', 'teacher as performer' and 'teacher-as-researcher' (Stevens & Huddy, 2016).

Much research on dance-teachers (e.g. Andrzejewski, 2009; Sims & Erwin, 2012) focuses on those in vocational schools or university settings. However, dance-teachers from pre-professional settings, such as private dance schools and secondary schools, may have different motivations for entering the dance-teacher profession than do their colleagues from these other settings. Furthermore, given that dance -teachers from pre-professional settings teach students between the ages of 3 years and 18 years they may well have an important influence on young dance students considering whether to enter the dance-teaching profession. It is therefore of some importance to investigate and understand the motivations of dance teachers from pre-professional settings to enter the occupational world of dance-teaching. A key aim of the current research, therefore, was to explore the motivations of ten female dance-teachers, from pre-professional settings, to engage in careers as dance educators. Additionally, given that women comprise the great majority of dance-teachers, with the female-to -male ratio standing at around 4:1 for pre-professional dance teachers in the United States (Risner, 2014), the focus was on female dance-teachers. Understanding female dance-teachers' motivations for embarking on this career, and some of the challenges encountered, provides useful and practical information to guide educators and supervisors. Such information can also be used to enrich and optimise dance-teacher training courses so as to prepare practitioners more realistically and effectively for their careers, and enhance their reflective practice skills.

Method
Data collection
Ethical approval was granted by the relevant UK University, and all participants provided informed consent. Recruitment of participants was via convenience and snowballing sampling, with the researchers contacting private dance schools[2] as well as placing an advertisement on the Dance UK website (https://www.danceuk.org/), to assemble a sample of 10 full-time professional dance-teachers, with ages ranging from 24 to 71 years (mean = 37.8 years). Participants taught a variety of dance forms, including ballet, contemporary, street jazz, and modern, to a variety of age groups of girls and boys (see Table 1). The length of time participants had worked as a dance-teacher ranged from around 3 to 30 years, providing us with a wide range of dance-teaching experiences. Whilst relatively small, this sample size is common in qualitative research, and did permit sufficient rich, in-depth data to be collected from the semi-structured interviews, in order to achieve data saturation.

Table 1: *Participants' demographic information*

Pseudonym	Age (years)	Genres of dance taught	Type of school participant teaches at
Melanie	71	Ballet	Private dance school
Eva	25	Contemporary	Freelance dance teaching company
Claire	62	Ballet	Private dance school, recently retired
Freya	41	Ballet, Modern, Greek, Lyrical	Private dance school, primary schools
Anne	29	Ballet, Contemporary, Street, Commercial	Private dance school, primary and secondary schools, local theatre
Avril	27	Ballet and modern	Private dance school
Caitlin	24	Contemporary, musical theatre	Primary and secondary schools
Laura	39	Ballet, tap, modern	Private dance school, secondary schools, FE college
Heidi	31	Ballet, modern theatre, tap, lyrical jazz	Private dance school, FE college
Esme	29	Contemporary, street, Bollywood	Secondary school

Procedure
An interview schedule was employed in order to focus the semi-structured interviews on key themes: (i) dance background; (ii) life experiences; (iii) experiences (and challenges) of teaching dance to both boys and girls. Interviews were carried out by the first and second authors at venues convenient to participants, and which afforded a quiet and private location where they could feel comfortable and relaxed, for example an interview room at the university and, when interviewed by Skype or phone, in their own homes. Employing a semi-structured format allowed us to guide the conversation, whilst remaining open to interviewees' introducing and developing their own areas of discussion.

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[2] Only private dance schools that provide after school, part-time dance classes were contacted. Full teachers in such schools may have a different experience of dance teaching, and a relatively homogenous group of female dance-teachers was required for this study.

Commensurate with Kvale and Brinkman's (2009, p. 3) description, we too considered the interviews as having "the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena".

Data Analysis
Data were subjected to Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) as a way to explore the meaning and sense-making of participants' everyday lives, and to identify individual and shared experiences. Authors A and B employed Braun and Clark's (2006) six-step guidelines to steer data analysis, which involved reading through the interview transcripts multiple times to promote familiarity with the data, which were then thematically coded. Patterns of meaning and interest were identified in an attempt to understand the participants' experiences via an initial discovery sheet of recurring words, concepts and ideas. Themes were reviewed, defined and named and a "critical friend" joined the team (Allen-Collinson, 2006) to scrutinise the data analysis and provide a more "distanced" perspective, as she was not directly involved in the data collection. Commensurate with a phenomenologically-sensitive research, this provided us with a degree of bracketing (Allen-Collinson, 2011). Interpretation of the data and analysis was reviewed, discussed, and critiqued by all authors, and member-checking (sending participants their individual transcripts) was used to enhance trustworthiness and credibility in a qualitative sense (Owton, 2015; Owton & Sparkes, 2015; Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2016). Participants' reflections are conveyed in their own words, with pseudonyms employed to protect identities. The key themes that emerged from data analysis are discussed below.

Results
From data analysis, the following themes emerged as salient: (a) Staying in dance; (b) Dance teaching as a career: challenges and skills.

Staying in dance
Motivations for becoming a dance-teacher varied. For Claire and Melanie, teaching was seen as a 'natural step' following retirement from professional dance-performance. For example, Melanie (71yrs) decided, "...when I stopped dancing at the age of thirty I had my two girls and then I decided to teach." For Claire (62yrs) her qualifications as a dance-performer allowed her to move smoothly into dance-teaching:

> I always wanted to be a dancer. So I was a dancer to start with, although I knew and everybody suggested and I understood that to safeguard a future, the dance qualifications, which came in those days, and still to a degree does, came alongside the further training that was required. And so the further training for dancing and teaching were always very linked together in those days.

In contrast to Claire's career-planning approach, Melanie did not initially consider dance-teaching:

> I never thought I'd teach, when I was doing it [being a dance-performer]. I hadn't thought that far ahead. But I was qualified to do so, after training. And then I became a teacher. (Melanie, 71yrs)

Melanie suggested that teaching would enabled her to continue involvement in dance for the remainder of her career: "Can go on a long while, teaching […] which I hope to do". Thus, having gained formal qualifications along with dance experience, Melanie and Claire were able to develop careers in dance and maintain a sense of self as a dancer beyond being dance-performers.

Incorporating both teaching and performing was familiar to some participants. For some time after training as a dance-teacher, Heidi (31yrs) juggled work as both dance-performer and dance-teacher. Nevertheless, her primary identification seems to be as a dance-teacher, using performance experience to enhance her teaching:

But it was nice because it gave me the opportunity to be able to talk to my students on a first-hand basis of how these things could be translated from classroom or barre work through to actual performance. And give them real life examples that I was living in terms of how to conduct yourself in rehearsals etc. […] it also allowed me time really to remember why I love to teach dance. It kind of gave you that real life: yes I like this too, that's why I like to teach it, reminder.

Many of the participants had, in their teenage years or when completing their dance training, helped out in dance-classes and had experience of combining the roles of "dancer" and "teacher", even if not in a professional teaching capacity. For many, dancing and teaching seemed not only linked through dance education, but being teaching "assistants":

So from age eleven I was teaching, well assisting, so I was sort of just doing like registers and fitting shoes and helping out. And that progressed to teaching on my own and stock checks and things. And I was there all the way until I was eighteen. (Avril, 27yrs)

In contrast to a narrative of "natural progression" into dance teaching, some participants expressed a desire to have been a professional dance-performer but feared not being "good enough", often attributing this to inadequate physical or performance skills. As Anne (29yrs) explained:

I knew I wasn't good enough to perform [laughs] […] I could have performed, but not in the way that I wanted to. I wanted to be Darcey Bussell and I couldn't. So those who can't, teach. Isn't that what they say? [Laughs] So I decided to teach instead. And I love it.

Although Anne clearly enjoys teaching, her quote suggests that for her dance teaching is "second-best"; the alternative route for those "not good enough" to perform. For Caitlin (24yrs), the option to become a dance-performer was not viable, "because I started late really. I just didn't feel like I'd ever get to the point of being a professional dancer. So I kind of said 'okay, I'm going to teach and do some research.'" Both Anne and Caitlin imply that corporeal limitations precluded careers as dance-performers. Freya (41yrs) makes this connection more explicitly: "Well, I would have liked to have been a dancer, but I wanted to be a classical dancer and my body wasn't going to do that, so that was ruled out."

Other participants highlighted the instability and financial insecurity of being a dance-performer, together with travel demands. Laura (39yrs), explained that the nomadic lifestyle of the professional dance-performer, along with her own lack of height, influenced her decision-making:

I can't remember why at such a young age that I thought 'no I want to be a dance-teacher, rather than a dancer.' […] But I think as I've got older, I'm a real sort of home, homely person and I like all my, you know, my family and all my familiar things around me. I'm not, I'm not a huge traveller. Erm and I'm also just under 5' 2" so it probably wasn't particularly realistic for me to go off and pursue a career as a dancer.

Heidi similarly identified practical aspects regarding stability and income:

I prefer kind of stability within my life style. I mean it was the, it was the main reason I never went into performing solely as a, as a day job. I did it always as supplementary to my teaching. I like to know that I can pay my rent and that I have, I know, like I like to have a schedule and what's going on from week to week, day to day and performing doesn't give you that kind of stability or structure. (Heidi, 31yrs)

These participants recounted narratives around their physicality and need for stability to explain their decision to become a dance-teacher. Such narratives suggest the power of these constructions, that are centred around professional dance-performer, as being the norm for those wishing to pursue a career

within the dance world. Nevertheless, regardless of reasons for entry to dance-teaching careers, this route allowed participants to incorporate their passion for dance into a career that could last a lifetime.

Dance teaching as a career: challenges and skills
Interestingly, some interviewees had faced negative responses to the idea of dance-teaching as a viable career. Laura (39yrs) felt that people considered dance/dance-teaching as a hobby rather than a career, as suggested by a careers advisor:

> I remember when I was younger going to see a careers advisor and I told her that I wanted to be a dance-teacher and she said, "well, no, what, what do you really want to do?" […] And I said, "I want to be a dance-teacher." And she's like, "no, but what do you want to do for a career?" And I was like, "well, I want to teach dancing." And she tried telling me that that wasn't a proper career. But you know, twenty odd years down the line and I'm still making a career of it.

Such attitudes often focused around the perceived lack of status of, and future in dance-teaching; Anne (29yrs) reported a conversation with a student:

> I had a horrible conversation with one girl, whose parents think it's [dance] a waste of time, they hate her going, they can't see what she wants to do with it. They want her to be a lawyer. They want her to go to university, do this, that and the other. They think she's wasting her time when she could be doing her homework.

The father of Freya (41yrs) told her that dance was "a frivolous occupation and there was no future for me in it." However, when she graduated with a first-class honours degree in dance-teaching, this "appeased my father no end". Indeed, many participants were highly academically qualified and had undergraduate and/or Master's degrees in dance. This challenges the putative dichotomy of "academic" and "practice" (dance) sometimes perpetuated by those outside the dance-world, such as parents and school staff. The importance of lifelong learning was also emphasised by participants. This often occurred spontaneously within the classroom, "the children ask questions, which is a good thing, you know, because you as a teacher are learning all the time", as Melanie (71yrs) noted; also on a more formal basis: "So, since taking this job I've gone to continued professional development at the Royal Academy, to learn just the boys' stuff" (Avril, 27yrs).

Whilst participants at times identified a perceived lack of status in dance-teaching, the wide range of complex skills and knowledge required was also highlighted. Many found the challenges involved in teaching very rewarding. Claire (62yrs) noted, "I mean loving teaching ballet in particular, because it is so challenging, because it is one of the hardest, but always the most, some of the most rewarding". The importance of having both the knowledge and physical ability to teach dance technique and syllabus was evident throughout the interviews, together with passing on transferable skills. Esme (29yrs) identified "resilience, team work, communication" as being key transferable skills, while Eva (25yrs) noted the importance of a gamut of skills:

> And a career in the arts does not necessarily mean a full-time practical dance career. It means being able to teach. It means being able to do your own admin, for being a freelancer. It means being able to watch performance and benefit from that.

The importance of being a reflective practitioner drawing on experience was often mentioned, for example, Laura (39yrs) noted, "So you know once you've done one thing and you've used something that works well, you think, oh I'll use that again." Adaptability to student needs was considered crucial to effective teaching. Indeed, Melanie (71yrs) reported how "...I adapt the choreography to suit them […] I just adapt to who I've got, who we have at the moment" (Melanie, 71yrs). Avril (27yrs) noted:

> You're constantly thinking of ways to, you know, make them enjoy it and understand it, without it being, you know, too complicated. And it has to be relevant to each age group, you know. You really tailor that.

Tailoring teaching according to age and gender was deemed key: "...If I'm using imagery then I would have to change the imagery to, to match something that a boy would relate to better than a girl. I would use […] much stronger imagery for the boys" Laura (39yrs).

Strong social and interpersonal skills were also required, along with the ability to motivate, nurture and build confidence in students. Avril (27yrs), for example, discussed a particular boy she had encouraged:

> And now he's applying to dance colleges and I feel very excited for him, that he's got that confidence in himself. Because that's a big part of our job, is you know, encouraging and instilling that confidence. It's a very, you're very naked when you're in a leotard in a studio, surrounded by mirrors looking at yourself.

She also identified the need to be sensitive and approachable:

> But if you … are someone that they can approach and then you can help them in whatever way you can, even just listening sometimes […] means that they're in a better place in the lesson and that they learn better. But my experience is a student who's stressed or worried or not happy doesn't learn as well as one who is.

Esme (29yrs) even likened the role of dance-teacher to that of therapist/mentor and said, "I guess you could compare it to a bit of therapy in a way, because a lot of the mentoring and the conversations that I have with my tutor group on a pastoral level I have in a dance studio as well." However, Melanie (71yrs) described the changing and increasing challenges of this pastoral dimension:

> Children are… you know more about their personal background now. They tell you more. They talk to you more and so it's different in that way. I suppose it's a little, I find it a little harder now, because, to get, I don't particularly want to get involved in all their personal problems [laughs].

Being a "good" dance-teacher demanded a wide range of skills and knowledge according to interviewees, and being an accomplished dance-performer did not guarantee being an effective dance-teacher. Avril (27yrs) argued:

> You don't want someone who's very strict and not used to talking to children. And that's my experience of a lot of the professionals. They say to me, "oh god I'm not used to trying to explain it to a child." Or they just don't talk very much. They just sort of do stuff and say: "now your turn". And I say… "oh if you tell them to transfer their weight on that foot then they'll know that they're going to use the other foot next. And don't say left and right, because they don't know that yet."

Interviewees also discussed dance-teaching in primary and secondary schools. Anne (29yrs) noted the reluctance of many Physical Education (PE) teachers to engage in dance-teaching stating, "So I do quite a lot of stuff with secondary schools and primary schools, where those PE teachers have said, 'do you know what, I can't bloody dance, let's get some woman in to do it for me.'" Freya considered many PE teachers to be "too frightened to teach dance" and that when taught as part of the British national curriculum, dance might be better categorised as "sport";

> I think they [PE teachers] look at it not as sport, but as physical activity […] Should it be taught as part of sport? Possibly. Because if it can't be taught as part of the arts curriculum,

because people don't have enough knowledge to put it across as an art form, then yes, it should be taught as a sport. (Freya, 41yrs)

Here, a distinction is made between dance as physical activity and dance as art form, suggesting that to teach dance competently teachers must be skilled in the physical *and* the aesthetic, artistic elements of dance.

Summary

In summary, all participants indicated that dance-teaching allowed them to have a career that expressed their passion for dance. For some, dance-teaching allowed them to continue dance careers after first having successful careers as dance-performers. For others, their body "type", or practicalities, such as a dance-performer's nomadic lifestyle and financial insecurity, were reasons to pursue teaching rather than performing as a career. Within participants' narratives, dance-performing and dance-teaching were often constructed as separate careers. Such dualistic notions have been identified in the literature (Andrzejewski, 2009; Wilson, 2016) and may be problematic in terms of identity formation for dance-teachers. Reflecting previous findings (e.g. Bennett, 2009; Moffett et al, 2015), a hierarchy of status within dance was identified by interviewees, with dance-performing considered more desirable a career than dance-teaching. Wilson (2016), however, highlights that many dance-teachers take on roles that are associated more with dance-performance, such as choreography, and making this explicit to students can help to break down perceived hierarchies. All our interviewees had choreographed shows for their students but did not seem to identify this as crossing boundaries with dance-performance. It seems beneficial, therefore, for dance-teachers to reflect on the shared skills of performer and teacher to create narratives that integrate such identities, and to question conceptualisations of career hierarchies.

A salient theme that emerged was the construction of dance-teaching as a low status career vis-à-vis careers outside of dance, due to a lack of "academic" status, despite many participants being highly qualified academically. Moffett et al. (2015) identified that the number of Master's degrees awarded in dance has doubled in the last 10 years in the United States. Nevertheless, such increasing academic status does not appear to have infiltrated into public consciousness in "westernised cultures" at least (for example, in the US and UK), and constructions of "academic" versus "creative" (e.g. dance) often devalue the "creative" element, according to the participants in this study. Participants argued that not everyone had the ability to be a dance-teacher, and challenged assumptions that good dance-performers would "automatically" be competent dance-teachers. This supports research by Sims and Erwin (2012) and Wilson (2016), demonstrating that, regardless of performance experience, those without proper pedagogic training are likely to be ineffectual teachers. Moreover, participants raised concerns about the ability and lack of motivation of school PE teachers without dance experience, to teach dance, given that dance is part of the UK PE national curriculum. This raised questions around whether dance as an art form can be separated from dance as physical movement. Removing the "art" aspect of dance would mean losing important elements of creating, performing and somatic practices inherent in dance (Andrzejewski, 2009).

Participants identified a wide range of skills and knowledge required in dance teaching that were highly specialised. Many were transferable skills and are valued in more "academic" and high-status roles: team work, communication, adaptability, flexibility, imagination, quick thinking, creativity, and interpersonal skills were considered vital for the role of dance-teacher. Dance-teaching requires high levels of self-motivation, adaptability, creativity, dance ability, heightened flexibility, and initiative, which some might find challenging. It is important for dance-teacher graduates to be aware that these characteristics are needed so they are sufficiently equipped to enter dance-teaching. Given these findings, we argue that dance-educators could enhance the well-being and future expectations of students by: (a) managing student expectations, (b) providing a realistic picture of training processes and career opportunities, (c) providing messages that a variety of opportunities do exist through hearing others' "success stories", not only in dance teaching but in other domains (e.g. choreography) to help students feel more positive, optimistic and supported through the training process. Whilst this study was designed to explore female dance-teachers' motivations and experiences, as a first step in

addressing a research lacuna, research on male dance teachers would be interesting in providing a comparative angle.

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