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'Bring on the dancers': reconceptualising the transition from school to work

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Our understanding of the transition from school to work has traditionally been underpinned by a three-stage model. This is one in which the first stage is a preparatory one, where the focus is on school, followed by a second transition stage and ending in a third stage, the successful entry to work. This is a model that has been challenged by work from the 'cultural studies' school but still informs much contemporary work. The study of freelance dancers' entry into work reveals a very different experience of the transition. Rather than a sequence of experiences of school, preparation for work and then entry into established employment, the dancer's experience is one of coterminous experiences of work, vocational training and family life that can start before the entry into primary education. This represents a serious challenge to the three-stage model as a general model for conceptualising transitions. Using the experience of the dancers and building on the work of Becker and Wyn, this paper explores how the concept of belonging points the way forward towards a more comprehensive conceptualisation of the transition.

Keywords: school to work; transitions; dance; belonging

Conceptual traditions

The three-stage model

Underpinning much of the debate on the transition over the last five decades is a conceptualisation of the process in terms of a three-stage model. We use the term to refer to the ways in which the transition is conceptualised in terms of three stages in the individual's process of making the transition from school to established employment in an occupation. It is a process which has a starting point in the home and school (stage 1), a period of transition (stage 2) and a definite end point as marked by the entry into work (stage 3).

This model informed much of the early work on the school to work transitions that took place in the 1960s as evidenced by the work of Carter, (1962), Roberts (1968) and Ashton and Field (1976). During this period in the UK, the transition was characterised by a sharp demarcation between the end of school, with most young people leaving school by 16, a short transition stage and then for the vast majority a successful entry into work. In general, the transition was seen as highly structured along class lines and relatively unproblematic.

Subsequent research in the next three decades identified a number of important developments in the conceptualisation of the transition. The first was to recognise that the process for many was extended as more young people stayed on at school and delayed entry to the labour market (Furlong and Cartmel 2007). The second was the recognition that it was increasingly non-linear, as some entered the labour market via government schemes, a casual job but then returned to further education or government training schemes (Furlong et al. 2003). The third was the recognition that the experience of the transition was becoming more differentiated in terms of gender and location, with young adults playing a more active part in negotiating the process and managing the risks involved (Evans 2002; Evans and Furlong 1997).¹ Nevertheless, the process of transition was still conceptualised in terms of the three stages. It was just that it now extended over a longer period of time. This was especially the case with the first two stages, the time spent in education and in securing entry into work. The end point remained a successful entry into work.

This three-stage model with all its subsequent modifications still informs a great deal of current research and theorising. For example Edvardsson and Jungert (2010) in Sweden, in Australia, Makino (2013) in Japan, Zubok (2013) in Russia, Graaf and Zenderen (2013) in the Netherlands and Chandra (2013) in India, all use a traditional three-stage model in their analyses. Liu and Nguyen (2011, 2) in Australia typify this when they open their paper with the statement 'Youth transitions refer to young people's journeys from school to post-school study and on to employment.' and later 'Having the capacity to secure full-time employment or continuing with further education or training is the traditional indicator of a young person's successful transition to adulthood': the same three stages, school, transition, established employment. This suggests that the framework still reflects important aspects of the reality facing young people. In view of this, it is not surprising that the traditional model continues to inform theoretical thinking (Raffe 2008). After all, for the majority of young people the movement into work and the associated benefits in terms of income and what this means in terms of providing the resources through which they participate in the wider society, do remain central.

Cultural studies tradition

Aspects of the three-stage model have not been without its critics. Some of the strongest have come from the 'cultural studies' tradition. With its origins in studies of youth culture (Willis 1977), the focus of enquiry was on the ways in which youth generated and reproduced different sets of meaning and the cultural resources through which they gave meaning to their experience of the world. Central to this was their sense of identity. The main focus of their critique was that transition studies, as they are sometimes called, focused on the structural aspects of the transition and ignored the ways in which young people made sense of their world.

As early as 2000s, Cohen and Ainly (2000) called for a reconciliation of the two approaches, a plea repeated by others such as Furlong, Woodman, and Wyn in 2011. One possible way forward in reconciling these two approaches and moving forward conceptually has been advocated by Wyn (2013). Building on earlier research that demonstrated the importance of family relationships in transitions (Wyn, Lantz, and Harris 2012), Wyn (2013) points to the importance of family and location as the means through which young people make sense of their world.² This led Wyn to suggest using the idea of 'belonging' in order to focus on the strategies young people use to belong, to link the way in which they use their sense of family and place to connect to the past, present and future. In this context, education remains important, as Wyn states: 'Education and work are significant elements of their lives, but these elements are framed by young people's sense of who they are and where they belong'. (Wyn 2013, 229). For the young people she studied in non-metropolitan locations, their sense of local community, where they belonged, was crucial to their understanding of who they were and where they were going. Through the recognition of the importance of education and work, Wyn acknowledges the significance of 'structural' factors but then seeks to highlight the centrality of the self and in particular their sense of who they are.

It is at this juncture that we introduce the experience of freelance dancers. They raise new questions about the adequacy of the three-stage model. For them it is not a matter of whether or not the transition is linear or non-linear, whether they sequenced from school to work or whether they enter work then return to school/training, for them the various components of the transition, family, school and work are coterminous, they run together and there is no end point to the transition. As we show, it questions the very basis of the three stage model for conceptualising the transition.

Like Wyn's interviewees, the dancers' sense of who they are and where they belong is central but has little to do with school or family and especially their geographical location. For freelance dancers, their sense of identity can only be explained as a result of their experience of the co-joining of activities in the family, vocational training and dance world through time and the creation of a strong dance culture. Again as we show, this requires that we extend the concept of belongingness.

The peculiar case of freelance dancers

Who are freelance dancers?

Whilst most professions require educational achievements to gain entry, dance like sport and music requires extensive and intensive training from a young age. Most dancers train for around 10 years in order to reach the required standard to continue training at a professional level. This early training is undertaken alongside academic schooling with further professional training commencing post-compulsory education and throughout their career. Academic achievements are irrelevant and entry into employment is primarily by audition. Training is slightly different for each gender, for example, men are not required to go 'en pointe'³ and generally women are not expected to lift others to the extent that men are. There are also a larger number of women in both training and the profession, a comparative study in terms of what this means for the individual would be very interesting but is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper. However, the pertinent points that emerged from the data are discussed below.

Those dancers who gain entry into a large dance company such as the Royal Ballet can enjoy a relatively stable and long-term position. By contrast, the freelance dancer's career is comprised of a series of short-term contracts interspersed with periods of unemployment or alternative (non-performance based) employment.

Like freelance and jazz musicians (Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009; Coulson 2012), freelance dancers are a notoriously difficult group to define or pin down (Equity, June Newsletter to Members, 2014; Ijdens and Langenberg 2008) and are usually involved in other areas of the labour market when they are not working as dancers. However, they tend to gravitate to either New York, London or Los Angeles as this is where the auditions for dance work are concentrated. When performing freelance dancers are a disparate group who travel extensively for work and find

employment in a variety of contexts and genres. They might work in theatre, television, film, music, on cruise ships, in hotels and for commercial events such as awards ceremonies and corporate entertainment. They are relatively nomadic in that they go where the work is and much of this work can involve travelling great distances, working overseas and touring.

There is also very little structure in terms of career progression, a pattern that can be found in other creative industries (Banks, Ebrey, and Toynbee 2014). A freelance dancer can be a choreographer or dance captain in one job but they must be prepared to take a job as a dancer without those responsibilities in the next. This lack of structure also means that greater experience does not equate to greater pay. Dancers within this context therefore understand the notion of a career differently; they just want to make a living from dance.

They are generally very flexible in that they may be required to dance a number of different genres (tap, jazz, ballet, street, etc.) and may even have short contracts with ballet or contemporary companies. Both company-based dancers and freelance dancers will have some shared experiences in respect of the intensity of early training and whilst the transition of the former into work would be interesting to explore it is beyond the scope of this paper.

Methodology

The data informing this paper are taken from a wider ethnographic study of dancers' career transitions comprising a combination of participant observation and interviews with 43 freelance dancers, 25 in the UK and 18 in the USA. Specifically, dancers were located in London and New York at the time of interview due to the concentration of dancers in these locations. However, as dancers are particularly mobile in the search of work, the country in which the interview took place may not reflect their country of origin or the country in which early training took place. The dancers in this study hailed from countries as diverse as Malaysia, Germany, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Spain and Ethiopia. The two locations chosen for the interviews provided the opportunity to explore a range of experiences, rather than providing the basis for an explicit comparative study, although some interesting differences and similarities emerged in relation to the structure of the transition in these two locations as discussed below.

The interviews were carried out by the senior author of this paper, a former freelance dancer who used her personal contacts to obtain the first round of interviews. Subsequently, in both the UK and USA, snowballing was used to obtain contacts other than those known to the interviewer in different parts of the business, that is working in different shows and contexts.

In ethnographic and qualitative research, power relations between the researcher and the interviewee may influence the content of the dialogue. There are a number of potential issues, one is where the researcher is an insider and has a subordinate or superordinate position and another is where the issues being discussed are contentious. In this research, these issues were minimised. The interviewer was an insider and had been a dancer but was not in an influential position within the profession, and the issues presented in this paper were non-contentious as they focused on biographical experiences. Indeed, being an insider was advantageous as the interviewees viewed the researcher as one of their own and this meant that a high level of trust was quickly established between the interviewer and the interviewee based on a shared and in-depth understanding of the culture. This led to greater richness of data. The main issue of being an insider was one of developing a sufficient detachment from the culture in order to question underlying assumptions and beliefs. This was resolved through various discussions with the other member of the research team who had no personal experience of the profession.

Due to the difficulties in defining the group two main criteria were used for selecting participants. (1) They were adults who had trained professionally as dancers and (2) they had experienced a period of paid employment as a dancer even if this was not their main source of income or indeed a current source of income. The ages of dancers interviewed ranged from 21 to 44 years, their accounts of vocational training to work transitions were therefore retrospective but provide data on a range of experiences spanning over a decade.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the participants by gender and location of interview.

	Male	Female	Total
New York, USA	7	12	19
London, UK	8	16	24

Table 1 Participant numbers by gender and geographical location

The larger number of female participants is indicative of the gender bias found in this profession. In addition to hailing from a wide range of countries, dancers were also from diverse

socio-economic back- grounds ranging from refugees and poorer, working class backgrounds to very affluent, privately educated origins but most located somewhere in the middle. It is not possible to tabulate these characteristics as to do so would be to provide unique information about individuals which could potentially identify them and breach ethical guidelines.

In the interviews, a biographical approach was employed in which dancers were asked to talk freely about their life from when they first encountered dance. This was followed up with more specific questions relating to their account of specific issues that had been identified prior to inter- view. This method was identified as useful in gaining insights into the participant's own values and salient points of their experience (Bertaux 2003; Roberts 2002).

Interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim with any identifying features removed and pseudonyms applied.

An overt insider approach was taken to the ethnography (Atkinson et al. 2010) with all participants fully aware of the project and possible outputs of the research, assurances of anonymity were provided and consent gained.⁴ The dancers were interested in the research being undertaken and provided full consent. The ethnographic fieldwork was conducted during rehearsals, in dressing rooms and social occasions involving groups of dancers. This aspect of the research was largely opportunistic although as word spread about the project dancers were inclined to talk about it further and invited the researcher to rehearsals and other events. Further data were gained through participation within the dance community both online and offline as an insider.

A qualitative, thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data. Themes were identified and refined by hand. A number of pertinent themes emerged providing insights into school to work transitions. Early exposure to the profession and professional norms and values, the universality and centrality of the value of dance and the sense of belonging and being kindred spirits united dancers to each other and the profession.

These themes are explored in more depth below, drawing out the ways in which structural, social and psychological processes interact and shape the experience of school to work transitions for this group. The analysis highlights how the differences in national values and institutions such as schools and training were overridden by the development of a strong and enduring identification with the profession as a result of exposure to it from an early age and common, shared experiences.

Challenges to the three-stage model

(a) The experience of early training: family, school and work as co- terminus experiences

Far from having separate experiences of school, vocational education then a transition to work, as happens with the conventional three-stage model, for freelance dancers, these experiences are coterminous and become fused together. The resultant experiences override prior differences in origins as they all develop a strong sense of identification with the profession from an early age. All of the dancers interviewed had attended dance training after school, at weekends and during holidays prior to embarking on professional training or entering the labour market. With few exceptions, the dancers started training at a very young age, some as young as 2 1/2 years old and most under the age of 10 (all of the female participants started under the age of 10). Many therefore had experience of dance prior to commencing compulsory, full-time education. During these early years, they developed a passion for dance and at the same time, what it means to be a dancer is quickly absorbed into the self-concept as these quotes demonstrate.

You're so impressionable when you're that young [5] you're like a sponge and you just absorb it, so it becomes like ... it's in your brain, I'm a dancer. (Anna)

I remember um ... about nine years old deciding that whatever it took I was going to become a professional dancer! (Beth)

The early experiences of these dancers were very similar. All of the dancers talked with pride about how dedicated they were to their training and this priority had implications for their regard of academic achievement, as we will see later. The second quote also highlights that they are aware of the intense training and work required to become a professional dancer even from this young age. The processes of developing a self-image as a 'dancer' and a tacit understanding of the requirements of the profession are therefore integrated, to be a dancer is to know and understand what it is to be a dancer.

This is not seen as a career choice at this age or even later as will be shown. They realise that they will have to work hard to become a dancer but the state of the labour market is of little

interest, as can be seen from these quotes. A dancer is a state of self rather than something that exists in relation to the labour market.

In addition to their early exposure to the professional requirements, there were a number of common experiences during their training that reinforced their commitment to the profession and helped generate and support a distinctive dance subculture. Despite subtle structural differences in the training of these young dancers, the content and intensity of training was essentially the same. These training structures can be broadly divided into two categories leading to slightly different routes into the profession. The first system is where dancers progress through the classes as they become more senior and improve in accordance with the teacher's perceptions of their abilities. The second is a more structured approach that requires dancers to pass examinations with an external body in order to progress to the next level.⁵ This process of training and examinations provided shared experiences that those outside of training could not relate to and thus brought together those who understood the dance world. For example, examinations usually take place during school time so the child has to be excused from school for a morning or afternoon. These examinations not only united dancers and their families in a common experience but also provided the young dancers (examinations can start from age five) with insights into the requirements of the profession.

It was nice going to my exams. I've learned a lot of things like discipline and how I must conduct myself as a dancer, like not chewing gum, eating in the studio, and that I must not laugh at someone. (10 yr old S. African student, ISTD correspondence⁶)

Here, it is evident that these exams not only served to ensure training standards but also taught the young dancers the appropriate behaviours associated with being a dancer, regardless of their country of origin. The ability to perform in this way also provides these children with a sense of pride and self-esteem. These experiences unite young dancers within their professional group.

Family experiences are also fused into these early experiences of work. In addition to training, dancers from all countries also participated in various dance-related activities during childhood including festivals, shows (some professional and paid), competitions and recitals, all of which meant that they spent a great deal of time with their dancing community which often involved the entire family. Dancing became a major part of family life and often took priority over family holidays and other social events.

A lot of holidays were taken up going and doing festivals and staying over. And it was a great life because there'd be loads of you, loads of families and my mum and dad were very close to a lot of them as well. (Wren)

There are a number of points that are striking here. Firstly, the amount of time that was taken up with these dance events and activities 'a lot of holidays'. There are numerous quotes that stress this point from dancers emanating from all geographical locations. This leads to the second point that dance becomes a priority not only for the individual but for the entire family as holiday time is taken up with this activity requiring family involvement. Here, we can see that life and dance have quickly become coterminous with an entire community that is immersed in the dance subculture. Finally, activities and shared experiences of shows, festivals, work-shops and competitions create a bond not only between the young dancers themselves but also their families providing a strong sense of belonging and community. It becomes so all encompassing that in this quote it is described as 'a great life', it has already become significantly more than a hobby. Before they leave school, they are already integrated into the culture of professional dance 'work'. Work in this context is thus an understanding of the processes of dance work, rehearsals, behaviours, vocabulary, etc. It is not viewed simply as paid employment, it is a way of life.

What is also interesting in this respect is that the sense of bonding and belonging to a special culture overrode other socio-economic differences. Some dancers were from single parent families, refugees and other less advantaged groups. They had often gained entry to training through scholarships, or had been introduced to dance through outreach programmes that funded the training (in the UK, Canada and Australia) or had received independent financial support from the school or sponsors. Others had an extensive and exclusive private education and came from comparatively wealthy backgrounds. However, in the dance class they were all the same. Their socio-economic status did not determine whether or not they had the potential to become professional dancers. Once they were part of the larger dance community, parents often pooled their resources and supported

each other to provide transport, costumes, uniform and emotional support. This reinforces the strong sense of community and belonging that brought together people from very diverse backgrounds.

(b) The experience of the transition

On leaving compulsory education, dancers take slightly different routes into the world of dance but this still produces the same commitment to the profession. This in turn means that their experience of the transition is very different from those following the more conventional route through school, vocational education or university and then into the world of work. This difference in experience is manifest in a number of ways. Firstly, for freelance dancers, the movement into work had started years before so that leaving school was not a movement into a new world of work, merely a deepening of their experience of a world they already knew. This means that unlike many of those following the conventional three-stage model, academic achievement has no significance, there is no sense of entering a new world of work and even those pursuing different routes into the profession experience the same sense of continuity in their lives. This continuity is evident in their training that continues as part of professional life rather than being finite or an adjunct. The dancer's experience of transition is then distinguished from that of others outside the profession in a growing sense of their separateness as a distinctive group. Finally, although many dancers experience discontinuity in the jobs they take on entering the labour market, with many holding casual jobs between their dance contracts, this non-linearity is not experienced as such, but rather as an integral part of their lived experience as a dancer.

In the UK, dancers aged 16–20 audition for a place at a professional, vocational college where they train for a further 3 years often specialising in a particular area or genre. These colleges have very close links to the industry and training at a college that is considered to be one of the elite training establishments can help dancers to gain entry to some auditions, agents and professional work whilst training.

I was lucky to get quite a lot of performance experience whilst I was at college with doing kind of external jobs and such like. So I did some TV work, and in my second and third year did pantomime at Christmas. And so you'd kind of go out and you'd work with professional choreographers and kind of work in the actual industry. (Neo)

This not only provides professional experience but crucially also provides opportunities to join professional networks through gatekeepers such as choreographers. Competition to gain entry into one of these colleges is extremely tough. As an example, one such college ceases accepting applications once they reach 1000 due to administrative constraints, as there are only 35 places. There are also substantially fewer male than female applicants, the ratio is around 1 in 8, creating further obstacles for women in relation to entry into the profession. Unfortunately, as this is not a comparative study, the nuances of this are left to be explored in future projects.

There are some similar professional training establishments in the USA, but with the exception of a few elite conservatoires, this does not always help dancers to gain access to auditions and entry is generally after 18 years. Furthermore, dancers attending colleges (Universities) in the USA will often also be engaged in academic subjects whilst dancers attending colleges in the UK will concentrate almost exclusively on performance skills often training upwards of 7 h per day. Some dancers in the USA will leave their formal academic training and local dance training at 18 and then move to either New York or Los Angeles in order to attend auditions and attempt entry into the profession. Whilst doing this, they continue their training at one of the independent, professional dance studios, often working on a 'work-study' programme which entails working at reception or providing administration as payment for classes. In addition, they then need to work to pay for their accommodation and living expenses and as a result are often working exceptionally long hours.

It was crazy I mean I would go ... I worked as a waiter so I would have class say from like ... three classes in a row, an hour and a half each starting at nine a.m. and then we would have rep rehearsal, and then I would literally, still sweating put on like my shirt and tie, and run like maybe twenty-five blocks to a restaurant and wait tables for like late at night. (Adrian)

Whichever route they followed, by the time they reach adolescence, these young people already identified themselves as dancers and moving into the profession was experienced as a natural (linear) progression. It was what their earlier experiences had prepared them for and clearly they were focused and committed to the profession.

It just was the natural thing for me to do. I just ... I don't know I just ... there wasn't any other option. That's what I was going to do. (Uma)

From their perspective, this prior identification with the dance community meant that any career other than dance was not given serious consideration, and therefore, academic credentials had little relevance in determining their future. When asked whether she had considered an alternative career Mia responds:

Absolutely not! I probably should have done but I found out that I had got a scholarship into Laines;⁷ I knew I was going to college before I started my GCSEs. So ... I didn't really try. (Mia)

This lack of concern with academic qualifications reflects the realities of the dancer's life. In both countries, in order to gain employment as a dancer they must attend auditions. There can be as many as six auditions (recalls) for one job. In order to get the job, the dancer not only has to be proficient in all aspects demanded of the role for which they are auditioning but they must also look right, this means they must be the right height, size, gender, age and colour for the job. A dancer's CV (resume) therefore consists of at least one photograph containing contact details and vital statistics and a written CV with details of their training, their height, hair and eye colour, vocal range, playing age and relevant experience listed in chronological order. Dancers do not include a personal statement or academic qualifications on their CV as the casting directors or other gatekeepers do not consider these as relevant or indicative of their ability to perform the job adequately. In the UK, a HE qualification in dance can be seen as an indication that the dancer was not a strong enough candidate for professional training. It is for this reason that the dancers interviewed were disinterested in gaining qualifications and 'credentials' at school, they knew that these were irrelevant in the dance world.

However, experiencing the transition in terms of continuity was not without consequences, one of which was the reinforcement it provided of the freelance dancer's sense of difference. This finding was consistent across all the dancers interviewed regardless of when they transitioned their gender or their geographical location. This difference was often experienced in terms of dance being an A-typical career and something that was not well understood by those outside the dance community.

Often I found they [teachers] kind of almost didn't like get it. Because it's such a completely different ... it's a different type of thing, it's a different kind of world almost. I remember ... you know, I suppose I was sixth form age, to do with whether I would need like UCAS points or things to be able to go on and I had to explain ... it's not quite like that, you know, you have an audition, it's completely different, it's all privately funded and run. (Joe)

The sense of difference has by this age been well established and the dancers are immersed in their own subculture. Dance has been prioritised over school and other social commitments. School is not the 'norm' for these dancers but rather an obligatory place that they attend but where they have little in common with others. They felt that those outside did not understand the profession and this often caused tension in careers meetings. Dancers from all countries, of all ages and both genders had very similar stories of their experiences with careers advisors and adults outside the profession seeking to help with career choices.

When people would ask me like what my back up plan was I was offended. I would be like back up? So you are assuming that I'm going to fail! Like I need something else to do when my little dancing days are done, then I can get serious. I was like fuck you! Excuse my language but I was like ... I took it as a personal affront. (Carl)

I got quite good grades in my GCSEs they assumed I would be pushing more and because all my family are pharmacists like ... it's a long line of pharmacists, they thought I would push more for that side of things if I didn't go into dancing, which they all thought I wouldn't because they kept saying it's a hard world, you won't be good enough. Its like how do you know you have never seen me dance! They had never seen me dance. They were just thinking little girl from Hull, she is nowhere near London; it's never going to work out for her. They just didn't understand. (Elle)

These quotes show that not only are the dancers already personally invested in dance but they also feel that they have a better understanding of the profession than adults advising them from outside the profession again reinforcing the sense of separation and difference from others and continuity within the dance community. Interestingly, the latter quote also shows a separation from the family work tradition of becoming a pharmacist. Whilst adults outside of the community seem to highlight the difficulty and uncertainty of their prospects in a dance career, the dancers themselves are completely focused on their goal of becoming a professional dancer having had enough success in a highly competitive training environment to believe that this was achievable. They had a single-minded, dogged determination to achieve their goals and they already identified themselves as dancers.

The final feature of their experience of the transition is that on moving into the labour market, freelance dancers often had to accept employment in casual and temporary jobs. Objectively, there is a strong element of non-linearity in their movement. Dancers were engaged in various other forms of work (e.g. waiting, theatre usher, bar work, retail and promotional work) whilst auditioning and attending dance classes to maintain their training. It is difficult to find work that will provide them with the time to attend auditions as and when they arise so they often find themselves going from one job to another. It also meant that some of the dancers interviewed did not derive the majority of their income from dancing but still remained committed to the profession and saw themselves as dancers.

We don't delineate between work and home because it kind of gets blurred in a way. So that ... dancing is you. (Grace)

They were a dancer because it was essentially who they were rather than simply what they did. Their sense of self as a 'dancer' was not related to or defined by the amount of money they earned as a dancer or the number of jobs they had obtained. These structural boundaries that define many conventional transitions were simply not relevant for them. They continued to socialise with other dancers and these networks were crucial in gleaning information regarding dancing jobs and opportunities. In part, this experience of continuity in the transition was possible because the 'work' involved in being a dancer was not only the act of performing but also the work that must be done in order to get work which included attending classes and maintaining professional networks through dancers and agents. Life and work are indistinguishable.

In a similar way to freelance jazz musicians (see Coulson 2012), the jobs that they engaged with whilst not performing were seen as a means to an end, a way to support themselves as a dancer as part of the 'freelancer's lifestyle'. They all knew that it was not going to be an easy life and that they would find themselves having to engage in other work but this was part of what it meant to be a freelance dancer and they were very proud to be dancers.

I started working in retail and trying to take class when I could, auditioning which was ... hard. Like juggling like your work schedule, like my thing was always like dance comes first. I am a dancer and that ... the other jobs just paid the bills and you know I would much rather you know skip work to go to an audition and than try to rearrange my schedule. (Frank)

Oh I am definitely not a dancer because of the money; it doesn't really give you much money at all! [Laughter] But there is so much more enjoyment out of ... your career than the money. There is so much more to it than that. I am really proud, I am very proud to be a dancer. (Babs)

With an objective ontological position, it is clear that there was no linear transition in that structurally dancers did not always progress from training to work in a linear fashion as defined by the three-stage model. However, they experienced the transition in a linear fashion because it was rooted in a specific value system that had been developed throughout childhood and because of the coterminous nature of experiences in training, work and home life. Structurally, they did not cease training once they left full-time vocational institutions but continued to train as part of the job but often at their own expense throughout their career; at the same time they began their career during training. This is problematic if one conceptualises transitions as a three-stage process, the boundaries that underpin this way of conceptualising transitions as separate stages simply do not exist.

The sense of belonging to the dance profession

If we now turn to the alternative conceptualisation of the transition stemming from the cultural studies group, it is evident that the emphasis that Wyn and others place on belongingness makes sense in the case of freelance dancers.

The dancer's early exposure into the dance community is key to the development of an identity that is intrinsically connected to the profession. With this comes a sense of belonging to a wider community although this wider community is bound by the culture of the community rather than being geographically located in any way (as suggested by Wyn, Lantz, and Harris 2012). As Becker (1963) suggests, this sense of belonging and of community is strengthened by a sense of being different from the 'norm', different from those outside the community. One of the most striking and abundantly evident findings was this universally shared understanding of the dance 'world'. This was almost identical across the sample and it was evident that they shared cultural values, norms, taboos and experiences which united them as a group regardless of their geographic location, gender or socio-economic background. One of the most significant and prominent values was the value of dance above all else. This sense of difference from the norm and belonging to the dance community started at school;

I think with people that want to be professional dancers it is something you know from a young age and I think we are very strong willed. We know what we want um ... I think that probably makes us different to a lot of people that go to school not really knowing what they want to do. And then having to take their exams and then find a job, and a lot of people um ... don't have any direction, don't have any idea what they are going to do where I think a lot of dancers know from a young age that's what they want to do. (Max)

Dancers often spoke about their life growing up in relation and opposition to that of their school peers, highlighting the different values for each group. The dancers were united to each other, as Becker (1963) suggests partly through their shared experience of difference.

I was dancing Monday through Saturday, after school for four hours, like four to eight and then Saturdays from like ten to four. So ... you know I would have to leave school and like rush to get to dance class so I didn't really get to hang out with people afterwards. There was no like going to the mall after class. Um ... Saturdays was out because I was at dance all day and you know ... so ... most of the time I spent was with dance friends. Yeah it's just having that like common like ... thing, we are all ... we are all working our butts off and sweating, it's just that camaraderie. (Luke)

I mean I remember when I got a bit older. I'd be there almost every evening and all day Saturday as well. I just loved it. Like you couldn't get me away from it. If there was like a friend's party or something, I'd always choose my dancing first. Like I just wanted to go all the time. And it would almost be if I'd done something naughty at home, my punishment would be you start behaving or else you're not going dancing, you know. (Ria)

The centrality of this tacit, uniting value became most apparent when asking the dancers whether their dancing friends, came from similar or different 'backgrounds' implying socio-economic group.

I: Would you say that people that you know, your sort of friends, from anywhere, not just from college, but you know, from the industry, would you say that they're all from a very similar background to you, a similar kind of upbringing, similar financial positions?

R: I think relatively yeah I'm in the same circle as the people who probably were brought up with the same modest backgrounds. The same sort of competitions and stuff, you know, dancing school stuff and things like that. Generally because you're in that circle, to meet those people (Darcy).

Dance was their primary source of reference. Even when the question was clarified to be clear that 'background' was in relation to financial status, the dancers would relate the answer back to dance and their common, shared experiences. Dance was the most salient feature in relation to whether they identified with someone or felt a commonality, transcending the more usual boundaries such as geographical location or socio-economic group. As we have seen, the culture and shared experiences led dancers to feel very connected to each other and very different from those outside the dance world who did not 'understand' them.

I think everybody knows we're a different breed of people! (Liza)

With dancers it's like your own people, you have this underlying bond that's unconditional because of what you are, what you know and what you do. (Darcy)

It is this 'bond', shared sense of community and belonging, connection and difference that creates a strong subculture. The dual nature of this culture in relation to dominant social norms is similar to the cultures of 'deviant' groups discussed by Becker in 1969. We have seen that throughout their life, dancers have felt different from the 'norm' they are focused, single- minded, passionate and intent on a career that is not well understood outside their community and does not relate to wider social norms such as the value of higher education, regular employment or high earnings. It is only through an understanding of this culture, this sense of belongingness that the experience of the transition shared by dancers can be understood.

Conclusions

The three-stage model has been shown wanting on a number of fronts. For dancers, the movement into work is not a consequence of movement through sequential stages but a process in which experiences in the home, leisure and family are coterminous and fused into a continuous process of preparation for a profession. Consequently, the transition is experienced as part of that process, not a separate and distinctive stage. Even non-linear moves into casual jobs cannot disrupt the process, while experiences which in the conventional route are seen as serious rites of passage, such as the achievement of educational qualifications, are seen as irrelevant by dancers. Thus, while the three-stage model is used extensively and can explain many transitions it cannot explain this group. Hence, as a general, model it is lacking.

As the cultural studies work has shown, what is needed is a model that can explain all instances or observations not just the structural sequencing of moves but also in the ways in which young people make sense of the process. This means incorporating their values and beliefs, what is important to them, where they belong and how they interpret and make choices within their own 'world'. It is here that Becker's sense of subculture and his way of understanding how this culture emerges in opposition to dominant values adds to Wyn's concept of belonging. What the experience of the freelance dancers adds here is the knowledge that these communities or subcultures are not necessarily geographically located but can be created in such a manner that they transcend local and even national differences.

The next task is to understand the range of such communities and sub- cultures and the social conditions that generate them. They provide a new framework within which atypical or unexpected transitions can be understood and conceptually move our thinking away from the three stage model that underpins current thinking and the dichotomous linear vs. protracted transitions debate. Once we have this, we are in a much better position to integrate this knowledge with that of the structural dimension of the transition, making a further step towards an understanding of the expressions of cultures in the context of changing social conditions as advocated by Furlong, Woodman, and Wyn (2011).

Notes

1. Some questioned the accuracy of these characterisations, for example Goodwin and O'Connor (2005) suggested that many transitions in the 1970s and 1980s were non-linear, stressing the importance of 'critical moments' Goodwin and O'Connor (2009). Furlong (2009) also suggests that this entire dichotomy (linear vs. protracted) is closely aligned to changes in general, political and theoretical discourse suggesting that it is our perceptions of transitions that have changed perhaps more so than the transition itself but this never imputed the integrity of the overall three-stage model.
2. A similar point has recently been made by (Hodkinson, Sparkes, and Hodkinson 2013).
3. Dancing on the tips of the toes with the aid of specialist dance shoes.
4. The research was conducted following ethical approval and full compliance with the ethical guidelines of both the BPS and BSA.
5. Structured examinations were predominantly found in the UK, Africa and Malaysia, the less structured approach in the USA and elsewhere.
6. ISTD – Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing – one of the UKs leading dance examination boards.
7. A very prestigious vocational college for performing arts training.

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