Self-Criticism as Experienced by Performing Artists
a Phenomenological Study

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SELF-CRITICISM AS EXPERIENCED BY PERFORMING ARTISTS:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Rosemary Hakes

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
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SELF-CRITICISM AS EXPERIENCED BY PERFORMING ARTISTS: 
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Rosemary Hakes, Ph.D.
Western Michigan University, 2001

The purpose of this study was to describe and document the essence of the experience of self-criticism for performing artists with the aim of providing recommendations for educational and therapeutic purposes. Moustakas (1994) defines essence as "that which is common or universal, the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is" (p. 100). In this study a phenomenological research paradigm was used. Each step in the data reduction process built directly toward revelation of essence through synthesis.

The central question guiding this research was: What is the essence of self-criticism as it is experienced by performing artists? Two related subquestions were: (1) What possible underlying themes and contexts account for the experience of self-criticism? and (2) What are the possible structural meanings of the experience of self-criticism?

The six participants in this study were professional performing artists: four principal dancers, one choreographer and dancer, and one musician (who was the principal in an orchestra section). All of the participants were British and were under contract with the Royal Opera House and Royal Ballet at Covent Garden in London,
England. The research strategy for this study used 90-minute in-depth individual telephone interviews.

The findings, which identified self-criticism as (a) losing confidence, (b) being afraid, (c) a pattern of thinking, and (d) an unending experience, are the essences common to the participants’ experiences of self-criticism. These findings suggest potentially important attitudes and directions to be taken by both clinicians and teachers who work with professional performing artists and performing arts students. The findings are discussed in relation to how they can guide future research. These include: communicating to performing artists in a clinical context the perpetual, self-regulatory purpose of self-criticism; identifying and challenging the pattern of thinking associated with self-criticism; and recognizing not only the fear, but also the courage involved in performance. In an educational or training context, the attitudes and directions indicated by the findings of this study are to support students’ confidence by (a) providing specific and detailed feedback, (b) balancing critical with noncritical comments, and (c) encouraging student self-awareness of strengths in performance.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the performing arts students I have taught over the years. Teaching is becoming a passion of mine, partly because teaching is such an extraordinary opportunity for learning. The idea for this dissertation came from the seminar classes I have taught on the psychological aspects of arts performance. My doctoral internship in Counseling Services at the Interlochen Arts Academy also afforded me an opportunity to define my clinical work with young performing arts students. I am grateful to Dr. Nancy Rosenau, Dr. Candace Ross, and Dr. Halimatun Mohktar for their nurturing support and for their gift of genuine understanding. This dissertation was discussed and refined in consultation with members of my doctoral committee. I would especially like to thank Dr. John Geisler for his support, assistance and advice, which was invaluable. Finally, I appreciate the extraordinary generosity shown to me by the six performing artists who participated in this study. I am grateful for their honesty and for allowing me learn from their experiences.

Rosemary Hakes
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing awareness that performing artists suffer from special problems related to their training, occupation, and life-style. Otswald, Baron, Byl, and Wilson (1994) consider the following conditions to be evident in performers’ lives: early exposure to high expectations of excellence, demands for perfection, long periods of intense practicing, fierce competition, high levels of anxiety associated with performance, and uncertain careers.

In response to an assignment in a seminar on the psychological aspects of arts performance, an accomplished undergraduate piano performance and jazz studies music major (name withheld, personal communication, March 17, 1995) wrote:

Whether the performance medium be within the jazz or classical performance genre, I am consistently plagued by the presence of an “imaginary critic,” a merciless negative life-force that belittles any sense of accomplishment, creating an aura of stress and anxiety before, during and after all performances. This critic has become such a regular visitor that I have an extremely difficult time distinguishing between the qualities of good and bad musical expression. This endless stream of excessive self-criticism has been noted by more than a few of my friends, relatives and music instructors - to a point where they have begun to make humor out of my apparent lack of self-interest.

This “imaginary critic” seems to hold a great deal of energy—both creative and self-destructive. This student’s narrative account suggests that he or she has a relationship to a part of his or her “self” that is isolated, compartmentalized and separate—and that it has a life of its own. This narrative account also seems to
indicate that there is tension, ambivalence, and/or struggle in this relationship and that this relationship seems to have endurance. This intense experience of self-criticism in relation to the performance experience can be debilitating, resulting in artists giving up their art.

Self-criticism is often associated with depression. Self-critical persons are particularly vulnerable to depression (Blatt, 1974, 1995). In a large-scale study of 2,212 members of the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians, 67.5% reported physical problems related to performance and 69% self-reported psychological problems. One of the most frequently reported psychological problems in this study was depression (Fishbein, Middlestadt, Ottati, Straus, & Ellis, 1988). Additionally, depression was reported by 20% of the 97 blues musicians studied by Brodsky (1995). Raeburn (2000) reported, in a yet unpublished 1996 health survey of 111 popular musicians at the South by Southeast (Austin) and North by Northwest (Portland) Music Conferences, that 29% of the musicians who responded to the survey reported that depression had hurt their ability to perform in the previous year. These studies suggest that depression is a significant problem for both classical and popular musicians. However, Jamison (1994) suggests that those persons with what have been popularly described as "artistic temperaments," that is, prone to emotional extremes, may self-select artistic careers and be disproportionately represented among the depressed.
Phenomenological Research Method

Most research on self-criticism has been quantitative. The design characteristics of traditional quantitative research methodologies do not measure personal meaning. In a qualitative study, through the examination and description of self-critical phenomena, both the soundness of existing theory and further understanding of additional components of existing theory may be uncovered.

The desire to understand human experience is what motivates a phenomenological researcher. Creswell (1998) reviewed five different qualitative research designs: biography, grounded theory study, ethnography, case study, and phenomenological study. "A phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or phenomenon" (p. 51).

As this research project developed, I realized that the purpose of phenomenology to understand human experience was in keeping with my own desire to understand self-criticism. What were the performing artists’ experiences, from their own point of view? This question indicated a phenomenological study.

Selecting a research paradigm, however, was just one of a series of steps toward developing a research plan and a methodology. The basis for the research design and methodology for this study is from Phenomenological Research Methods (Moustakas, 1994).

Moustakas (1994) developed a rationale for a phenomenological study based on a review of the development of phenomenological ideas and writings.

The aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it.
From the individual descriptions general or universal meanings are derived, in other words the essences or structures of the experience. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13)

In addition to defining more specifically the intention of phenomenological study, Moustakas proceeded, in subsequent chapters of his book, to lay out a systematic approach to phenomenological data collection and data analysis, with the goal of discovering the essence of the participants’ experience.

The description of the method, the specific steps of data gathering and analysis, and Moustakas’ suggestions regarding the style of the research report were all elements that were attractive. Phenomenology’s emphasis on the human aspect of research, as well as the strong interpersonal nature of the data collection, suggest an autobiographical approach to the description of the research study and to the report (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological concept of bracketing, or consciously setting aside one’s prejudices and preconceptions, is also a definite prelude to an autobiographical component of the research report. “In phenomenological research, the question grows out of an intense interest in a particular problem or topic. The researcher’s excitement and curiosity inspire the search. Personal history brings the core of the problem into focus” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 104). This study follows the Moustakas’ design closely, including his emphasis on the personal connection to the report.

Having defined the general research topic and the methodological model, the research question was clarified: What is the essence of the experience of self-criticism in performing artists? Moustakas (1994) defines essence as “that which is common or
universal, the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is” (p. 100).

Another value of qualitative research, specifically phenomenological research, is its potential to increase empathic understanding of persons who experience the phenomenon (Tesch, 1984). In responding to the questions, Why would we want to know what any experience of any person is like? Is such information knowledge in the scholarly sense? and, Isn’t scholarly knowledge only that knowledge that is generalizable? Tesch (1984) states:

Generalizations give us certain “laws,” “rules,” or “explanations.” When we know these rules or explanations, we can use them as guidelines for our actions . . . Generalizations, however, are severely limited: they apply only to the average case . . . Human beings are individuals with very different histories and personalities. Professionals who work with people need more than knowledge of rules and regularities. They need empathy and insight that comes from knowing in which ways and how differently each person may experience a certain situation or event . . . Phenomenological research accumulates knowledge on the range of the individual, the specific, and the unique. Its purpose is to probe into the richness of the human experience and to illuminate the complexity of individual perception and action against the background of our knowledge of the general laws or regularities in human nature. (pp. 4–5)

In studying the range of meanings that performing artists may attach to self-criticism, a framework for the interpretation of their experience can be articulated, which in turn can be a basis for empathy and use in therapeutic settings. Further understanding of the various ways in which performing artists experience and interpret their experiences of self-criticism may contribute to more effective training and treatment.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe and document the essence of the experience of self-criticism for performing artists with the aim of providing recommendations for educational and therapeutic purposes.

Research Questions

Because the purpose of this study was to construct an understanding of self-criticism as it is experienced by performing artists, the central question that guided this research was: What is the essence of self-criticism as it is experienced by performing artists? Two related subquestions were:

1. What possible underlying themes and contexts account for the experience of self-criticism?
2. What are the possible structural meanings of the experience of self-criticism?

Definition of Terms

Self-criticism was, for the purpose of this study, generally defined as the act of making self-judgments and evaluations. In the context of the performing arts, it may be useful to acknowledge that there is both a self-condemning side to self-criticism, which leads to personal distress, and a noncondemning side, which provides a perspective by which performers can realistically examine their performances. These
aspects of self-criticism have been called "dysfunctional" and "functional" self-criticism, respectively (Driscoll, 1983).

In addition to self-criticism, a performing artist was defined as a musician, dancer or actor. *Giftedness* refers to being "endowed with great natural ability or talent" (Berube, 1983). In the professional literature on giftedness, children are determined to be gifted based on measures of internal processes (i.e., IQ scores, aptitude tests). Adults are defined as gifted based on external success and achievement (Tolan, 1994). Giftedness is the broader term under which talent is included.

**Scope of the Study**

The focus of this study is on individual experiences. The phenomenon that was studied was the experience of self-criticism. The unit of analysis for this study was the individual. This is in the context of the performing arts and is within a culture of giftedness, which includes training that is geared toward talent. An overview of the scope of the study can be seen in Figure 1.

**Summary**

Greater understanding of the experience of self-criticism in performing artists from the artists' points of view can enhance the clinical treatment of self-criticism in performing artists. The findings of this study may also be of interest to those who teach and train performing artists. Additionally, greater insight into performing artists' experiences of self-criticism may contribute a unique dimension to the general theoretical and empirical literature on self-criticism.
Figure 1. Overview of the Scope of the Study.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Must one be crazy to be great? This question was recently addressed by Pruett (1997), a performing musician for 30 years and a child psychiatrist for 20, in an essay reviewing Scott Hicks' film, *Shine*. This popular film is the portrayal of the "tortured genius" of Australian pianist David Helfgott. In contrast to the stereotype presented in the film, Pruett (1997) stated:

Certainly there is no shortage of tragedy in the lives of many great composers, playwrights and other artists. But it is far from universal, and only cynics would suggest that it is an essential navigational aid to finding the muse... For every Mozart or Rachmaninoff there are many more highly gifted performers or composers who do not totter on the brink of decompensation in service of their art. That is not to say that the demands of lasting creativity are not punishing and rigorous. But they are not in and of themselves pathogenic. (p. 29)

From listening to his patients, Pruett describes artistic expression as an experience, "that can feel like a privileged pilgrimage or a horrific obligation" (p. 28). One of Pruett’s patients said:

"Hardly anybody else will ever get it," a 14-year old prize winner once said about why he practices until his fingers bleed despite having been told to slow down. "Yeah, I blame my teacher, but I think it’s really me. I know how good this can be, but I drive myself nuts trying to be perfect every time." (p. 28)
There is an intensity with which performers pursue their careers. This may lead to other problems that can affect both their experience of performing and the performance itself. One of these issues is self-criticism.

Overview

As a topic of study, self-criticism is primarily connected to the literature of the discipline of psychology. In addition, self-criticism is tied to the literature on giftedness, creativity, and training in the arts. Literature from multiple disciplines will be reviewed for this study so that a range of perspectives on how performing artists experience self-criticism can be explained.

First, in the theoretical literature, the broad conceptualizations, and constructs that have attempted to explain the process of self-criticism will be presented. Next, the psychological literature on self-criticism focuses on constructs more specific to self-criticism including the development of self-criticism, measures of self-criticism, and approaches used in treating self-criticism. The literature on giftedness identifies self-criticism as a trait associated with giftedness and includes descriptions made by adults and children of their self-critical experiences. The next section describes the impact of self-criticism on the creative process. The final section addresses the contribution specific aspects of training in the arts have on the development of self-criticism.
Psychological Literature on Self-criticism

In this section the general theoretical frameworks from which self-criticism is conceptualized and the specific psychological aspects of self-criticism cited in the literature will be presented. The purpose is describe the characteristics of self-criticism and self-critical individuals.

Self-criticism is synonymous with the Freudian concept of superego dysfunction (Freud, 1923/1989). There are two parts to the superego which seem to function as one entity: the conscience and the ego ideal (Freud, 1923/1989). Failure to attain an acceptable ego ideal (later called the “ideal self” by object relations theorists) creates guilt and the superego attempts to repair itself by resorting to punishment (Freud, 1923/1989).

From its Freudian origins the superego is connected to human self-destructiveness, but for Jung, conscience is based on an autonomous (not acquired) “moral function” (Lesmeister, 1998). Contemporary psychoanalysts refer to this process as the “self-regulating” function of the superego. The purpose of self-criticism, from a psychoanalytic viewpoint, is to maintain psychic equilibrium.

In an article based on the psychoanalytic treatment of 14 professional musicians, Babikian (1985) concluded that the superego plays a crucial role in the development of the professional musician. He stated:

The superego plays a major role in helping the person achieve the goal of becoming a first rate performing artist. It is my opinion that the development of a strong superego is of utmost importance in bringing about the discipline and in maintaining the deprivation needed in order to devote the required time to perfect the practice of art. (p. 146)
With performing artists, the superego can often be severe, punitive, harsh and rigid (Babikian, 1985). The superego helps in the development of a person’s talent, but in the process it may take a heavy toll from the emotional life of the performer.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Blatt (1974) distinguished between dependent individuals, who have strong needs to be cared for and protected, and self-critical individuals, who are achievement-oriented, have high internal standards, and are perfectionistic. Dependent individuals are considered to be prone to depression related to early separation and loss, while self-critical individuals are considered to be prone to “introjective depression,” which is based on the internalization of criticism by others, particularly parents. This type of depression is associated with “superego formation and the relatively advanced and complex phenomenon of guilt” (p. 109). The “introjective depression” is characterized by intense feelings of inferiority, guilt, and worthlessness.

On the basis of a factor-analytic study employing the Depressive Experiences Questionnaire (DEQ), Blatt, D’Afflitti, and Quinlan (1976) identified self-criticism as one of three factors in depression. According to the authors, the self-criticism factor, in comparison to the other two factors (dependency and efficacy), had the highest correlation with other measures of depression. The self-criticism factor, according to Blatt et al. (1976), consisted of items related to:

concerns about feeling guilt, empty, hopeless, unsatisfied, and insecure, having failed to meet expectations and standards, and being unable to assume responsibility, threatened by change, feeling ambivalent about self and others, and tending to assume blame and feel critical toward self. (p. 385)
When considering psychological vulnerability to the most lethal forms of depression, Blatt (1995) believes that highly perfectionistic and self-critical individuals are often particularly vulnerable to the experiences of failure and helplessness that lead to severe depression and, most dramatically, suicide. From the research, Blatt (1995) suggests that:

Patients with depression deriving predominantly from feelings of loss and loneliness may make suicide gestures... but individuals who are highly self-critical and who feel guilty and worthless are at considerable risk for serious and lethal suicide attempts. Thus, intense perfectionism and severe self-criticism are associated with a vulnerability to severe depression and a serious potential for suicide. (p. 1010)

The distinction between these subtypes of depression becomes especially relevant when discussing treatment approaches. According to Blatt (1995), short-term psychological treatments of various types and medications are relatively ineffectual for the highly perfectionistic, self-critical client. Fortunately, however, these clients may be responsive to long-term, intensive psychotherapy.

Arieti and Bemporad (1980) have proposed a “dominant-goal” type of depressive personality. According to Arieti and Bemporad, dominant-goal individuals have learned from their parents that only achievement is rewarded with support and acceptance. Consequently, these individuals largely obtain their sense of meaningfulness and self-esteem from pursuing goals. The realization that a goal is unobtainable threatens not only their self-esteem, but can also threaten the structure upon which the meaning of their lives is based.

In a study of the relationship between dependency and depression, Birchnell (1984) has identified a “deferential” dependency, which corresponds to Blatt’s
introjective depression and the self-criticism factor. This “deferential” dependency includes both deference and self-abasement; the first refers to humility, respectfulness, and a reluctance to be outspoken or complaining, and the latter involves self-judgment, self-accusation, and self-punishment. Birchnell (1984) believes these two aspects of dependency have the most in common with depression and with self-criticism.

Self-criticism has been identified as a variable linked to the “autonomous” personality (Beck, 1987). From a cognitive-behavioral perspective, two basic personality modes have been described by Beck (1987). The “autonomous” mode includes internalized standards, goals, and criteria for achievement that tend to be high and an emphasis on independence, control and action. Individuals who are operating within an autonomous mode are vulnerable to depression when they feel they have failed to reach a goal. Beck has described autonomous depression as emphasizing defeat or failure, as the individual “blames himself continually for falling below his standard (self-attribution), and excoriates himself for his incompetence (self-punishment)” (p. 27).

Representing a cognitive-behavioral perspective, self-criticism has also been explained as a self-defeating type of information processing experience (Ishiyama & Munson, 1993) and as an internal sabotaging agency (Elliott, 1992). From this viewpoint, cognitive restructuring, which is a broad concept encompassing a variety of psychotherapeutic techniques that help people become aware of how thoughts affect feelings and actions, is employed. This awareness, in turn, can be used to alter
attitudes and beliefs that contribute to psychological distress. Salmon and Meyer (1992) address the issues related to self-criticism in musicians. They state:

Many performers are excessively self-critical. "I'll look like a fool," "I can't make a mistake or play less than perfectly," or "I must be crazy to be nervous about playing this piece" are common types of comments made by performers. Such comments invite a reassuring response that, to the performer might convey validation. (p. 140)

This is a way of using self-criticism to "fish" for compliments. But a reassuring comment such as "Don't worry about playing the piece perfectly—we'll understand," can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Is the performer's effort being supported, but not the product or does the comment indicate a lack of very high expectations of the performer?

Another reason for being critical of one's musical skills is to "beat others to the punch." Salmon and Meyer (1992) used the example:

I know—the slow movement of the Beethoven didn't have much rhythmic pulse," was the first comment a student made to her teacher after playing a sonata during a performance class. She responded to an anticipated criticism only to find that her teacher was quite complementary about her performance. In making this statement, the student also conveyed the impression that she was able to simultaneously play and critique her own playing. (p. 140)

In anticipating criticisms from others in order to "beat them to the punch," the student is reinforced for engaging in self-criticism.

Self-criticism has been linked to anger. Dunkley, Blankstein and Flett (1995) administered the DEQ (Blatt et al., 1976) and the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory (Spielberger, 1991) to 233 university students. Scores on Self-criticism were positively correlated with Trait Anger. One of the conclusions reached was that
"self-critical persons who are concerned with achievement and self-worth and who are overly critical of themselves may be preoccupied with anger" (p. 1342).

Experiences of childhood trauma and subsequent feelings of helplessness have also been related to the development of self-criticism in adults. Miller (1981) in describing the context in which a child may develop self-critical attitudes, states:

Often a child's very gifts (his great intensity of feeling, depth of experience, curiosity, intelligence, and quickness) will confront his parents with conflicts that they have long sought to keep at bay by means of rules and regulations. All this can lead to an apparently paradoxical situation when parents who are proud of their gifted child and who even admire him are forced by their own repression to criticize, reject, suppress, or even destroy what is best, because truest, in that child. (pp. 114–115)

Miller (1981) also describes the paradox involved in working with adults who have been raised in this type of environment, she states:

Quite often I have been faced with people who were praised and admired for their talents and their achievements. According to prevailing attitudes, these people—the pride of their parents—should have had a strong and stable sense of self-assurance. But the case is exactly the opposite. They do well, even excellently, in everything they undertake; they are admired and envied; they are successful whenever they care to be—but behind all this lurks depression, a feeling of emptiness and self-alienation, and a sense that their life has no meaning . . . They recount their earliest memories without any sympathy for the child they once were, and this is the more striking as these patients not only have a pronounced introspective ability, but seem, to some degree, to be able to empathize with other people. Their access to the emotional world of their own childhood, however, is impaired . . . In general, there is a complete absence of real emotional understanding or serious appreciation of their true needs beyond the desire for achievement. (pp. 30–31)

The development of self-criticism has been related to anxious avoidant attachment (Bowlby, 1988). Avoidant attachment is "a pattern of attachment in which the individual has no confidence that, when he seeks care, he will be responded to helpfully, but, on the contrary, expects to be rebuffed" (p. 124). Patterns of
attachment are persistent and tend to be self-perpetuating. An anxious avoidant child may try to “become emotionally self-sufficient and may later be diagnosed as having a ‘false self” (p. 125).

Elliott (1992) relates the process of developing an “inner critic” to negative programming that occurs in childhood. This is described as an imposition of “should” commands, which are backed up by threats of emotional punishment. These emotional punishments are described as feelings of defectiveness, shame, guilt, inferiority, and magnified fear. The result of these emotional punishments is that the perfectly normal natural self is “converted” into a devalued self. In response to this conversion, “reactivity” is created—a kind of machinelike lifestyle that includes the need to compensate for the “inner critic’s” devaluing messages by acquiring “buffers.” As reactivity is created, the individual learns rigid “acts.” These acts are “tough,” “tender,” and “self-sufficient.”

Self-criticism has also been related to stress (Segal, Shaw, Vella, & Katz, 1992), stress-induced biochemical changes (Gruen, Silva, Ehrlich, Schweitzer, & Friedhoff, 1997), and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (McCranie & Heyer, 1995). In a study of 73 hospitalized Vietnam veterans with combat related PTSD, self-criticism predicted greater PTSD severity, independent of symptomatic depression.

Treatment

Both individual psychotherapy (Kris, 1990) and group psychotherapy (Phelps & Luke, 1995) approaches have been successfully utilized in treating persons who...
have self-critical attitudes. A structured, cognitive-behavioral group approach was used by Phelps and Luke (1995), and a psychoanalytic approach by Kris (1990).

Achieving an effective working relationship with performers, particularly in a therapist role rather than a teacher role takes sensitivity to several factors specific to working with performers. Babikian (1985) explains this concept from a case analysis:

From the very beginning of her analysis, V. was an excellent student and not a patient. She cooperated fully and willingly. She was on time, remembered her dreams, reported them faithfully, and even paid her bills on time. In short, it was almost impossible to find anything wrong in this perfect student-teacher relationship that she structured. She cast me in the role of teacher and started asking for instructions and guidelines. It was then that we started having difficulties. (p. 144)

The most important factor related to self-criticism, according to Salmon and Meyer (1992) is developing performers’ abilities to accurately assess their own capabilities. They state:

Performers are generally extremely sensitive to judgements of others. Motives for performing in public often center on gaining approval from others, but conversely, feature an intense fear and expectation of criticism. This attitude has much in common with an external locus of control, in which individuals defer to others for judgements of their worth and competence. With respect to the therapeutic relationship, this tendency means that the performer is likely to see the therapist as a source of praise and validation as well as criticism. As a result, the therapist’s feedback to the client will probably be construed as either praise or criticism. (p. 141)

This makes establishing a working relationship challenging. Salmon and Meyer (1992) recommend therapists teach self-assessment skills so that performers can develop sensitivity to their own capabilities. Often self-referential statements of performers reflect “good and bad,” polar opposite thinking.
Self-criticism and Giftedness

The experience of self-criticism among gifted adolescents (Noshpitz, 1994) and gifted or talented adults has been documented. Tolan (1994) views self-criticism, even in musicians with undeniable career success, as stemming from, in part, "paradoxical self-esteem problems that often come with extraordinary gifts" (p. 138).

Neihart (1998) identifies the "loss of the true self" in gifted children as a precursor to self-critical attitudes later in life. She states:

Gifted children might be more vulnerable to painful subjective experiences of self. They are, perhaps, more likely to take up the burden of self-criticism at an early age. The betrayal of self that takes place for many individuals is probably made worse for gifted people who are more likely to be consciously aware that they are losing themselves. This may explain in part the intensity of suffering that some gifted people experience regarding their perceived loss of self-esteem. (p. 189)

Not only might there be a loss of the true self, gifted children may feel pressure to become someone they are not, developing a false self (Miller, 1981). This pressure can come from parents, teachers, other significant relationships, and the culture itself.

From discussions with gifted adults, Lovecky (1986) identified five traits that produce potential interpersonal or intrapersonal conflicts:

1. Divergency, which is a preference for unusual, original, and creative responses. On the positive side, gifted adults possessing this trait are able to find creative solutions to problems. On the negative side, divergent thinkers have difficulty in situations where group consensus is important.

2. Excitability, which is characterized by a high energy level, emotional reactivity, and high nervous system arousal that allows gifted adults to take risks and
have a high degree of productivity. Gifted persons with this trait may also find it difficult to self-regulate. Boredom and the need for stimulation can produce a habit of constant activity.

3. Sensitivity refers to “a depth of feeling that results in a sense of identification with others” (Lovecky, 1986, p. 573). People who are sensitive may be unusually aware of the feeling tone of situations. “They think with their feelings” (Lovecky, 1986, p. 573).

4. Perceptivity refers to the ability to understand several aspects of a situation simultaneously and to be able to quickly see the core of an issue. “Correlates of the trait of perceptivity include the ability of gifted adults to view their own behavior somewhat objectively, to assess their own as well as others’ motivations, and to base their responses on perceptions of underlying dynamics” (Lovecky, 1986, p. 573).

5. Entelechy, which is about inner strength and “a particular type of motivation that brings deep feelings to a relationship in which others are encouraged to be their best” (Lovecky, 1986, p. 574).

More recently Lewis, Kitano, and Lynch (1992) identified the following characteristics of gifted adults: idealism and a sense of justice, unusual emotional depth and intensity, self-criticism, psychomotor overexcitability, sensory overexcitability, pressure for action, capacity for sustained effort, imaginal overexcitability, mixing truth and fiction, emotional overexcitability, and identification with others’ feelings.
Self-criticism and Creativity

Self-criticism contributes to blocks in creativity. In a descriptive study on how artists overcome creative blocks, Hirst (1992) interviewed six visual artists who identified three types of creative blocks: (1) normal process blocks; (2) psychological blocks, which included the experience of self-criticism and were sometimes triggered by the art itself; and (3) major creative blocks, which occurred immediately after completing a significant commissioned work or exhibit. Accompanying major creative blocks were feelings of depression, self-doubt, frustration, fear, and desperation.

Hanlon (1998), a writer, describes her experience of self-criticism:

I have a very fierce Inner Critic, and although I can put him—her actually; my Inner Critic is a very destructive feminine voice—in her place more frequently than I used to, I still succumb to her vile ways. My family, friends, and students know I periodically fall into a song of lament. "Oh God, I'm never going to write again. This time I know it for sure. I've gone dry. Who am I to think anyone wants to read my books anyway? I'm stupid. Stupid, stupid, stupid! I want to crawl into a pit and die." This is not make-believe. These are my true ravings after a fierce Inner Critic attack. And I have been laid low by such an onslaught for weeks, months, even years. This despite the fact I've had eight books published. To that my Inner Critic says, "So, what about the best-sellers list? Have you ever made that?" (p. 167)

Even successes are criticized, turning what should be positives into negatives. This experience of self-criticism seems like a vicious circle spiraling downward.

Self-criticism and Training in the Arts

Another area addressed in the literature is self-criticism and its relationship to the type of training, usually critically based, that can be experienced by performing artists. "Training for a performing career involves a stream of almost continuous
critical feedback from expert professionals” (Gedo, 1996, p. 160). This may lead to negative self-criticism and self-doubt about one’s ability to assess their own performance (Salmon & Meyer, 1992). This is especially true for students because “as their technical expertise increases, their skills are subjected to even more rigorous scrutiny. It is not surprising that many performers develop increasingly negative self-assessments of their capabilities, even though by more objective standards their skills are improving” (p. 140).

Self-criticism is related to the Freudian concept of the superego. Babikian (1985) points out the positive functional value a strong superego has in the development of the discipline and dedication necessary for success as a performing artist.

Dancers are also vulnerable to self-criticism. Dancers learn by watching others. Hamilton (1998) believes self-criticism is related to dancers competitively comparing themselves to others. “It’s like riding an emotional roller coaster. One day you’re up, the next day you’re down—all because of someone else’s performance” (p. 128).

The development of self-criticism in performing artists begins in early childhood. Early performance-oriented feedback may be tied to implicit messages about one’s qualities as a person.

Statements like “good performance” or “you need work” can easily be interpreted as an evaluation of one’s overall qualities as a person. Such a distinction normally is lost on young children, to whom phrases like “nice playing!” and “good girl!” are practically indistinguishable. (Salmon & Meyer, 1992, p. 27)
Critically based training can make it difficult for performing artists to distinguish between evaluations of their performance skills on one hand and their attributes or value as people on the other.

Another arts training aspect related to self-criticism that may be problematic for performers is that they may get contradictory feedback from others (Salmon & Meyer, 1992). Developing the capacity to objectively appraise one's own performance in the midst of contradictory feedback is important. Self-criticism, however, includes an element of self-condemnation. "Many performers seem driven by an unrealistic desire to measure up to impossibly high standards set by themselves or someone else; and as a result, they never seem to take pleasure in what they do" (Salmon & Meyer, 1992, p. 29).

In a journal for piano teachers, Weinrich (1986) described the experience of self-criticism and its function from a different vantage point:

We're getting paid (however meagerly) to be musicians. We are supposedly experts at what we do. We are the outer voices in our field who hope to become the inner voices of our students, dangerous as that might be. In order to do that, we have to take a stand. In fact, we are taking stands all the time. As performers we take a stand every time we make a sound. The programs we choose reflect our inner stand; so do a thousand other aspects of performing. Persisting with a musical detail in a chamber music rehearsal requires taking a stand. As teachers and performers we have to be very insistent people. No wonder we have inner voices. (p. 67)

Training in the arts is critically based. Within this training context come unique demands and dangers.
Summary

To summarize, the research literature on self-criticism is multidisciplinary. In addition to literature on giftedness, creativity, and training in the arts, a broad range of psychological constructs were reviewed including: self-criticism as an "autonomous" personality variable, self-criticism as a "vulnerability marker" for depression, especially severe depression, and the connection between self-criticism and a preoccupation with anger.

Anecdotal self-reports, case study presentations, and descriptive research methods have been utilized in the study of self-criticism in addition to quantitative research methods. A systematic exploration of the experience of self-criticism, however, has not been encountered.

The design of this research proposal has been influenced by the literature review in the following ways:

1. Like most aspects of being human, self-criticism is complex. There is not a single component to study or one angle from which to study it. Qualitative methods seem most appropriate to address this complexity.

2. The phenomenological method is designed specifically to systematically reduce descriptions of individual's experiences to a central meaning or essence.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Overview

The research strategy involved examining the personal perspectives of individual performing artists on their experiences of self-criticism. First, a description of the general procedures of the phenomenological method, along with definitions of terms used in the phenomenological method and a brief description of the data analysis method of Clark Moustakas (1994) will be presented. The remainder of the chapter includes a description of the participants and procedures involved in the study.

General Procedures of the Phenomenological Method

Moustakas (1994) recommends in-depth interviews as an appropriate data collection method and suggests an unstructured format for the interviews. The individual in-depth interview method used in this study can be described as an open-ended conversation that has focus. This method was selected because it allowed "the participant's perspective on the phenomenon to unfold as the participant views it" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 80). From these descriptions, the essence of the experience of self-criticism for individual performing artists was obtained.

Moustakas (1994) highlights two major processes in the phenomenological research method: (1) bracketing and phenomenological reduction; and (2) the use of
intuition, imagination, and universal structures. These processes will be described in the following paragraphs.

Bracketing and Phenomenological Reduction

Philosopher Edmund Husserl saw the activity of bracketing as the critical device of phenomenological understanding (Camara, 1996). Bracketing, also referred to as phenomenological reduction, is a position of researcher preparation which involves reflection and study in an effort to separate oneself from, or "bracket," restrictive aspects of the researcher's own lived experience. The researcher may then proceed, knowing that the personal background is still present but is consciously set aside as much as possible. Husserl also developed the concept of Epoche in relation to phenomenology. Epoche comes from the Greek and means to refrain from judgment, to refrain from ordinary means of assessment and ordinary ways of perceiving (Moustakas, 1994). Again, the elimination of presupposed ideas is emphasized, as is the "raising of knowledge above every possible doubt" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22).

Another aspect of the phenomenological method is the special emphasis placed on the techniques of intuition, imaginative variation, and the development of universal structures (Moustakas, 1994). Each of these techniques were utilized in this study.

Intuition

Intuition as defined in the American Heritage Dictionary is "The act or faculty of knowing without the use of rational processes; immediate cognition" (Berube,
Husserl would add the component of reflection, however, and present the intuitive-reflective process as a key skill of a successful phenomenological researcher.

All things become clear and evident through an intuitive-reflective process, through a transformation of what is seen, first intuitively in the common appearance, in the manner in which something is presented and then in the fullness and clarity of an intuitive-reflective process. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 32)

Noddings and Shore (1984) describe the process of gaining familiarity with the subject under study and letting the material have its own voice. “What I must have is a will to try, to risk, to look, to judge, and to stick with the material until it speaks to me” (p. 112). The result will be a greater understanding and a deeper familiarity with the data.

**Imaginative Variation.**

When conducting phenomenological data analysis, imaginative variation is the methodological step which follows bracketing and reduction (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers use their imagination to examine the horizons of the data from a variety of perspectives and frames. “Variation is targeted toward meanings and depends on intuition as a way of integrating structures into essences” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98).

Intuition and imagination are integrated in the researcher’s mind, which has been freed from preconceptions through “bracketing.”

Moustakas’ (1994) steps to Imaginative Variation are as follows:

1. A systematic review of the possible structural meanings at the root of the textural meanings;
2. Recognition of the contexts and the themes that account for the emergence of the phenomenon;

3. Recognition and consideration of the pre-existing life situations that affect the participant’s relationship to the phenomenon;

4. Searching for vivid examples of invariant structural themes which facilitate the development of the final structural description of the phenomenon. (p. 99)

Universal Structures

The imaginative variation process is employed in the development of textural and structural descriptions of the experience based on data from the research participants. The final step in phenomenological research is to use these textural and structural descriptions to form a statement revealing the essences of the experience. This statement of synthesis is the culmination of the methodological analysis and reveals the universal structures of the experience under study. These universal structures do not serve as the basis for a definition of the experience, but rather as the essences for that time and place. Moustakas (1994) stated:

The essences of any experience are never totally exhausted. The fundamental textural-structural synthesis represents the essences at a particular time and place from the vantage point of an individual researcher following an exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon. Husserl (1931) concludes that “every physical property draws us on into infinities of experience; and that every multiplicity of experience, however lengthily drawn out, still leaves the way open to closer and novel thing-determinations; and so on, ad infinitum.” (p. 100)

Some definitions of terms will be presented before providing a detailed description of the Moustakas phenomenological data analysis technique. The
definitions will be followed by more specific descriptions of the methodology from Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (1998).

Definitions

The following definitions are taken from Creswell (1998) and may be helpful in further explaining the Moustakas data collection and analysis techniques. The definitions are organized alphabetically rather than in the sequential order of the analysis process.

Clusters of meanings. As the third step in the phenomenological data analysis process, the researcher groups the statements into clusters of similar meaning units, or themes. Repetitive and overlapping statements are deleted.

Epoche or bracketing. This is the first step in the phenomenological reduction process. The researcher sets aside, or brackets, all preconceived notions about the phenomenon at hand to the greatest extent possible. This allows the researcher to more fully understand the experience from the participant’s own point of view.

Essential, invariant structure (or essence). The ultimate goal of the phenomenological researcher is to reduce the meanings of the experience to their essential structure. The researcher uses the textural description to reveal what happened and the structural meanings to reveal how the phenomenon was experienced. Aspects of the experience which are universal to all the participants are invariant structures and reveal the essence of the experience.

Horizontalization. In the second step of the phenomenological data analysis process, the researcher lists every significant statement which is relevant to the topic. Each statement, or horizon of the experience, is given equal value.

Imaginative variation or structural description. The researcher writes a “structural” description of the experience after the textural description is written. The structural description investigates how the phenomenon was experienced, looking at all possible alternate meanings and perspectives.

Lived experiences. Individual experiences of the research participants, who are recognized as conscious human beings, are of critical importance in phenomenological studies.
Phenomenological study. A phenomenological study describes the meaning of experiences of a phenomenon (or topic or concept) for a number of individuals. In this type of study, the researcher follows an analysis technique to reduce the experiences to a central meaning or the “essence” of the experience.

The phenomenon. This is the central concept being examined by the phenomenological researcher. It is the concept being experienced by subjects in a study.

Structural description. The structural description, written by the researcher, attempts to describe “how” the phenomenon was experienced by the individuals in the study.

Textural description. The textural description, written by the researcher, attempts to explain “what” was experienced by the research participants.

Summary of the Moustakas Phenomenological Data Analysis Method

This brief, general summary of the Moustakas data analysis technique provides a background to the phenomenological method used in this study. Further explanations of the technique, along with examples from this study, are included in the Data Analysis section of this chapter.

To begin, it is important to reiterate that the ultimate goal of the phenomenological process is to reduce the description of the experience being studied to its essential elements, or to its essence. After the preliminary preparation, including “bracketing” the researcher’s own preconceived ideas about the research topic, the Moustakas (1994) process begins with in-depth interviews. Working with an individual interview transcript, the researcher examines the participant’s responses for each statement regarding the phenomenon. Each of these statements is listed as a “horizon” of the experience for this participant. The horizons are then examined for
duplication and overlap and are tested to ensure that they represent a clear expression of a component of the participant's experience. These expressions become the "invariant constituents." The invariant constituents are grouped into themes, or clusters of meanings.

At this point the researcher writes three documents which express that individual's experience. The first document is the "textural description," which describes what happened in the participant's experience. Next, the researcher writes a "structural description," describing how the phenomenon was experienced. The third document combines these into a "textural-structural description" and serves as a summary statement of the participant's experience.

These steps are completed for each of the interview transcripts. The final step in the Moustakas process is to compose a "composite description" of the experience. This composite description is based on the individual textural-structural descriptions and serves as the study's summary statement of the essence of the experience.

Participants

Characteristics of Participants

The volunteer participants in this study were six elite professional performing artists; four principal dancers, one choreographer and dancer, and one musician (who is the principal in an orchestra section). All of the participants were British and were under contract with the Royal Opera House and Royal Ballet at Covent Garden in London, England. The age range of the participants was 25 to 33. Each of the
participants identified themselves as performing artists who have experienced self-criticism.

**Recruitment of Participants**

Access to three of the performing artists was gained through the researcher contacting the Executive Director of the Royal Opera House and Ballet. The Executive Director is related to a friend of the researcher. The remaining three participants were recruited through one of the participants. The first three participants initiated e-mail contact with the researcher and for the remainder of the participants, the researcher was given their names and e-mail addresses as persons who were interested in being involved in this study. The researcher initiated contact with them.

Since a phenomenological study seeks to understand the essence of the experience being studied, it is not necessary to have random selection. A more important consideration is the ability of the participants to truly reflect on and articulate their experiences.

**Participant Involvement**

In addition to the initial contact via e-mail and an exit (termination) interview, the six participants were each involved in an in-depth individual interview, which was conducted by telephone.
Access Issues

There were two access issues that needed to be addressed: "context" and "individual." First, regarding the context, there is, based on this researcher's experience, a strong taboo among performers against talking about psychological problems in the context of their performances, which may be related to the high degree of competition in these settings. Some groups of performers, especially dancers, have a tightly knit/closed community. That my access to these individuals came through people they knew contributed, I believe, to their willingness to participate in this study. Secondly, on an individual level, the resistance/defenses related to self-critical persons (from the psychological literature) include protecting their sense of identity and personal control by seeking distance from others (Beck, 1987).

On the other hand, giftedness has been linked to open expression of emotions and performing artists are an insightful group to begin with. They tend to show interest in "figuring out" their emotions, their psychological conflicts, and their art. Being emotionally attuned and aware is considered an asset in the performing arts (Pruett, 1997). This self-reflective capacity was a pivotal determinant in selecting the in-depth interview data collection method used in this study.

Protection of Human Subjects

A possible risk to the participants was exposure of confidential or sensitive life information. One of the purposes of the initial contact was to establish the informed
consent of the participants. Initial contact took place prior to the participants' inclusion in the study. This initial contact took place via e-mail. Each participant was sent two copies of the consent form (Appendix B), one to keep for their reference and the other to be returned to the researcher.

Another risk was the possibility of discomfort following disclosure of personal information. Participants received information about supportive services available to them. None of the participants indicated a need or desire to use these services. Each performer also participated in an individual exit (termination) interview. During this time, the researcher asked for feedback from the participants about their experiences of being in the study. This exit interview was conducted by telephone.

There were several potential benefits for the participants in this study. First, this was an opportunity for the participants to contribute knowledge to the disciplines of psychology and performing arts medicine. Second, there was a possibility that the disclosing of information could have enhanced and strengthened each participant’s clarity about their identity as performing artists. Third, the opportunity to “tell one’s story” and articulate their experiences to the researcher could have deepened the participants’ understandings, values, and meanings inherent to their experiences.

**Procedures**

*Epoche*

The first step in a phenomenological study is to reflect on the researcher’s own attitude toward the subject at hand. In this case, I needed to acknowledge my
prejudice toward viewing self-criticism as mostly destructive. That I have heard other musicians talk about their experiences of self-criticism is one of the reasons why I was drawn to the study. Tension between an existing bias within a research topic and the need to bracket my bias is typical in a phenomenological study, since Moustakas (1994) mentions the value of studying a subject with which a researcher has a personal connection. However, it is still an important part of the researcher’s responsibility to acknowledge and reduce or eliminate bias from the research process in order to uphold the validity of the study.

Bracketing the question was the next, more specific step in preparing for the study. In this case, the researcher reflected on the specific research question, acknowledged a prejudice toward viewing self-criticism as mostly destructive, and approached all aspects of the study in a neutral manner. The mechanisms of the Moustakas data analysis process did an excellent job of removing, to the extent possible, the personal bias by the researcher in the data analysis aspect of the study.

Data Gathering

The decisions about the data collection methods were based on strategies from Moustakas (1994), Marshall and Rossman (1995) and Creswell (1998).

Practice Interview

A practice phone interview was conducted with a local musician. The purpose of this interview was to: (a) to review the procedures for the study, (b) to develop the researcher’s interviewing skills, (c) to identify and clarify interview questions, and (d)
to check the recording equipment. This practice interview did not change the interview questions.

**Individual Interviews**

The six participants each participated in one in-depth interview. Each interview was conducted by the researcher by telephone and was audio tape recorded.

After introductions and some “small talk,” most generally about how the participant came to be involved in the study, the researcher read the information from the consent form (Appendix B), which included a brief description of the study. Reading this statement provided an opportunity to start each of the interviews off on a note of standardization. This type of uniform statement is suggested by Moustakas (1994). It served to start the interviews with a common understanding of purpose for our conversations. As more interviews were conducted, the researcher also came to believe that reading this statement provided a sense of community to the participants. Reading the statement gave each of them an awareness of the study as a whole and of their own individual importance within that whole.

The next stage of the process was to turn the focus of the interview toward the participant. The initial statement made to the participant was “Please describe for me as completely and clearly as you can an experience during the last year when you felt the most intensely self-critical.” The performer was then invited to elaborate on that comment, and the interviewer’s role was be to help to facilitate the articulation of the self-critical experience. Subsequent questions were then based on the comments that emerged as the participants talked about their experiences.
Additional questions included, “What most exemplifies self-criticism for you?” “What role does self-criticism play in your life?” “What does your self-critical experience look like, sound like, and/or move like and what meanings do these representations of your experience of self-criticism have for you?” and “How did you first become aware of being self-critical?” An interview guide (Appendix C) was used as the interviews were conducted. Questions from the guide were used at various times in the interviews. All of the questions from the guide were asked, but not sequentially.

Performers were asked to clarify and elaborate on phrases and words the researcher didn’t understand. The researcher maintained a focus on understanding the experience as the performer was relating it. Examples of the researcher’s prompts for clarification and elaboration included, “Can you describe what you felt like?” “Can you recall what it was like for you as you were beginning (or ending) your performance?” A serious attempt was made to make certain the questions did not lead the performers toward specific or predetermined conclusions but, rather, led them to clarify and elaborate.

When the researcher perceived that the experience has been fully articulated, the following question was asked: “Is there anything else that you would like to add that we haven’t already addressed?” Any further descriptions were explored, and the interview concluded with discussion of the data check timeframe and the researcher’s expression of gratitude to the participant for their willingness to be involved in the study. The interviews were each 90 minutes long.
Data Checks

Subsequent to the interview, each participant validated the in-depth interview transcripts. This technique addresses the fidelity of the data to the phenomena criteria and insures a lack of distortion (Giorgi, 1994).

Each participant was sent, via postal service, the transcript of their interview and asked to make any comments, corrections, additions, or deletions. The responses from the participants to this invitation ranged from no response to a six page response. This additional information did not result in any substantial changes to the findings.

Exit Interview

An exit interview with each participant was conducted by telephone for the purpose of processing the termination of the relationship with the researcher and the participants' involvement with the study. These exit interviews took place after all of the in-depth interviews and data checks were completed. During these interviews, the researcher thanked the performing artists for their participation, provided an opportunity for the participants to give feedback to the researcher regarding their involvement in the study, which the researcher may incorporate in conducting future studies. The participants were interested in reading the findings of the study and were very gracious about their involvement in the study. Typical comments from the participants were “It’s been a pleasure,” “Anything else I can do to help, let me know,” and “I don’t know if what I’ve said has been helpful to you.”
Based on the participants' feedback, a change this researcher would incorporate into future interview based studies will be to overestimate to the participants the time it takes to return their transcripts to them for a data check. That was the only suggestion made by the participants.

**Face-to-Face Interviewing Versus Telephone Interviewing**

All things being equal, this researcher believes that face-to-face interviews are preferable. There were, however, compelling reasons to utilize telephone interviews in this study. Creswell (1998) states, "A telephone interview provides the best source of information when the researcher does not have direct access to individuals" (p. 124).

Elite performers are those individuals considered to be the prominent people in the performing arts community. Elite performers are likely to be busy people who operate under demanding time constraints and schedules. Elite performers are likely to live in metropolitan areas that are long distances from the site of this study. Marshall and Rossman (1995) state, "Elite interviewing has many advantages. Valuable information can be gained from these participants because of the positions they hold" (p. 83). Telephone interviews allowed elite performers to be included in this study.

An obvious drawback to telephone interviews was that the researcher could not observe the participant’s body language and instead needed to rely exclusively on what the participant had to say and their voice tone. The telephone has, however, been used successfully as a communication tool in individual therapy (Sehl, 2000). The developers of an online psychotherapy and counseling website, Cyberanalysis (http://www.cyberanalysis.com) promotes telephone therapy as
a tried and tested medium that is live and direct yet not face to face, therefore avoiding the anxiety of direct confrontation. For some people this may facilitate a more frank disclosure—this was the logic behind confessionals and it is equally useful in psychiatry. (p. 1)

Interviews for therapeutic purposes and research purposes are different. The purpose of a therapeutic interview is the facilitation of change in a client/patient/analysand. The purpose of a qualitative research interview is to obtain knowledge of the phenomena being investigated. Kvale (1996) states that despite such differences:

It is possible for research interviewers to learn from the modes of questioning and interpreting developed in therapeutic interviews. There are many problems with psychoanalysis as a research method, and the scientific status of psychoanalytical knowledge is still debated...It is a continuing paradox that the therapeutic interview, which has not been accepted as a scientific method and for which general knowledge production is a side effect, has produced some of the most viable knowledge in the discipline of psychology. (p. 79)

Telephone interviews are often used in survey research because they are cost-effective and allow for rapid data collection (Frey & Oishi, 1995).

The responses and reactions to the telephone interviews was very positive. All participants were open and interested in talking about their experiences. The degree of self-disclosure by the participants and their ability to articulate their experience was high.

**Transcription of Interviews**

Each interview was transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist. Each participant was given the opportunity to review and correct the transcript of their interview. Corrections to the transcripts were made based on the feedback from
the participants' reviews. Accuracy in the transcriptions was important to maintain the soundness of the data.

Data Management

The researcher used Microsoft® Word 98 and a systematic hand method for data management. Although specific computer software has been developed to support analysis of qualitative data, the limitations of the software programs outweighed the benefits. It was important for the researcher to be able to see all of the specific references for each participant at one time. The size of a computer screen was prohibitive. The method used in this study involved cutting text units from the transcripts, which were then glued onto legal size file folders. This hand method of data management has been recommended for use in qualitative studies that have less than 500 pages of text (Creswell, 1998). This study generated 180 pages of text.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Data Analysis

This study followed the general processes of a phenomenological study as proposed by Moustakas (1994) as well as his eight-step data analysis technique, which will be explained in greater detail in subsequent sections of this chapter. In all phases of the data analysis, two fundamental priorities were of concern: (1) to represent the essential characteristics of the experience as revealed by the participants, and (2) to keep in close touch with the participants' original characterization and to remain faithful to that original intent.

Review of Each Transcript

In order to maintain the anonymity of the participants, the researcher used a coding method to refer to them in the data analysis. The six participants were called P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6 hereafter in the data analysis and in examples from the interviews. In the following sections, a description of the individual steps in the analysis process will be provided, as well as a sample of each data step.

The data analysis process started with obtaining a sense of the whole. The essence of this pattern is to break down transcribed interviews into units that can be more easily analyzed.
Horizontalizations

The first step in the Moustakas’ (1994) data analysis method is to “list every expression relevant to the experience” (p. 120). Moustakas calls this Horizontalization. This process stems directly from the Epoche process and involves the researcher maintaining an attitude of neutrality. Everything that appears is marked “with a horizon of ‘undetermined determinability’ by the possibility of being seen and known in its essential nature and meaning” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 87).

Data from Participant 4 (P4) will be used to illustrate the expressions that are relevant to the experience (horizons). Then examples of how the horizons are formed into meaning units and how the process of clustering the meanings into themes is presented.

The first exercise was to review the transcript and lift out each horizon relevant to the experience. In creating these horizons, the researcher worked from the interview transcripts and kept the language of the participant intact. Each individual statement was numbered chronologically as the interview progressed. From a conversation about the experience, horizons were lifted out and listed. The following listing shows a portion of the horizons from P4’s data, with gaps in numerical sequence showing which horizons are included in this sample. (The sample horizons were chosen to give a sense of the process rather than an exhaustive listing.)

Yes. You’re immediately—there’s this thing that you’re at this other school. You’re given the impression that you would not make it as a dancer unless through some—you did this sudden test of Hercules or whatever, that some people would. I’m not defending them, but they would have seen it as trying to be realistic. (paragraph 85)
Well, yeah. I think it was just—I hope to God that it’s psychologically better there today. I don’t think it actually is. So you were instilled with you’re not a big fish in a small pond anymore, that kind of thing. (paragraph 87)

That’s probably my most critical time. I try not to look at it or cover myself up. (paragraph 117)

No, as a student it was much worse. It’s not something now that I worry about. This probably doesn’t help. I’m obviously self-critical, but I try—now I’ve got to the point that unless something goes terribly wrong, it was my fault for not concentrating or really—but those sort of things I can’t change. I’m not going to change now. I don’t know quite how I got from when I was very self-critical and felt that I couldn’t do it. I think feeling that and then having a job, I felt this surely doesn’t compute right. (paragraph 119)

I have the job, so that means that somebody obviously think I must be able to dance. (paragraph 129)

Yeah, I see myself doing it forever really. I’m probably more self-critical about actual choreography than I am about dancing in a way. I’ve just been going on with my memoirs. That is actually where self-criticism for me really comes into play. (paragraph 139)

I’m critical of my own work that I make up. (paragraph 141)

Well, because I couldn’t sit back from it. It’s that feeling of there’s nothing you can do. That’s different than the actual how it’s made. You’re then suddenly trusting the performers to do it justice and you’ve got to let it go. That’s a nerve-racking moment. (paragraph 151)

Yes. But the actual making it up and the substance of it, I can get very critical about. I just look at it and go, is this rubbish or is it anything? (paragraph 153)

Although it was a dance piece, there wasn’t actually much dancing going on. There was a lot of other stuff, more pedestrian movement. There wasn’t anything really leaping, details. And actually through teaching it to someone new, I suddenly realized that it was complicated and so that kind of dispelled my worry about that issue about the piece. (paragraph 155)

I keep it in my head and battle it in my head, I think. (paragraph 165)

I managed to. So what I’m slowly realizing if I can get to the ideal state of being 11 and going back to my imaginary world willy nilly—it’s not as easy as that, but it gives me more courage and that comes back to your thing
about making pieces for yourself because I’m trying to actually make a piece that’s going to interest me and excite me. So the next one I’m doing, I think is really quite a weird piece, but I’m fascinated by watching the dancers do it, and at the moment I’m sort of trying to let that be enough and not to worry about what are going to say, is it going to be a public humiliation. What I said about that first commission and I got the reviews and I saw my name in print and it was terrible, I literally felt every single person on the street would have read that thing. Of course, they wouldn’t. (paragraph 193)

Yeah, and I hid in the cinema and watched the same film twice. That’s something you have to get over. I still would find it difficult. You always say before it, I won’t pay any attention, but I think even now if I read something bad about myself, I would say I don’t like that. But it’s not I’ve done something wrong. I’d say no, it’s probably more human to go well, if you think that’s fine, I don’t think that or butt off or whatever. I realize I’ve got to take that less seriously. (paragraph 195)

I have to say that having a life is the one thing that gets me through all the works things. (paragraph 211)

Yeah, sort of something hanging over you like chopping you in. (paragraph 227)

It’s something confining. (paragraph 229)

Yeah, I think so. I’d like not to be—I think that’s why I’m less self-critical about my dancing is because more energy probably goes into the choreography work. Yeah, sort of like a dark box around you, quite close to you. (paragraph 229)

I think that it sometimes stops me trying ideas. (paragraph 233)

Yeah. I do think it’s limiting. I don’t see what I would lose about it, to be honest. I don’t think if I had no self-criticism at all, that I would make anything worse. I see it as a very negative thing because self-criticism can be seen as both, good and bad. You’re informing yourself about things. I don’t see it like that. I see it as a very negative thing. Because of all the evaluation, I find that—a lot of people like to analyze and go into it and that’s self-criticism in a way. For me, I find that somehow negative as well. (paragraph 235)

Yes, about come on. You’ve stayed in the same place for too long. One of the things I don’t want to do is get stagnant. (paragraph 261)
The collective horizons are in Appendix D. Entire horizons and specific personal information with in horizons were removed in order to protect the identity of the participants.

Invariant Constituents

The next step is Reduction and Elimination (Moustakas, 1994). In order to determine the horizons of the experience, each expression is tested for two requirements: (1) Does it include a moment of the experience necessary for fully understanding that experience? and (2) Is it possible to abstract and label it? If an expression meets both of these requirements, it is included as a horizon of the experience. Each of these is then included on a new list.

Next, overlapping or repetitive statements are eliminated. Some expressions are eliminated if they are too vague to express an element of the experience. “The horizons that remain are the invariant constituents of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). Table 1 is the list of Invariant Constituents for P4.

Accomplishing this process for each of the participants proved to be very tedious and somewhat difficult. Translating the horizonalizations to invariant constituents involved reflection as well as close study of the participant’s words and meanings. At the end of the process for each of the participants, however, was a set of data, which was truly representative of the individual interviews. The collective invariant constituent lists are in Appendix E.
### Table 1

**Invariant Constituents: P4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invariant Constituent</th>
<th>Horizon Reference Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-criticism is a loss of confidence.</td>
<td>191, 119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-criticism is related to fear of embarrassment and humiliation.</td>
<td>159, 193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-criticism is mediated by the opinions of others.</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-criticism is experienced as an internal dialogue.</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-criticism is experienced alone, hidden from outside view.</td>
<td>165, 183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-criticism is confining.</td>
<td>229, 227, 233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-criticism is self-generated.</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-critical thinking is dichotomous. (all or nothing)</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-criticism hangs over you.</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-criticism is related to return on investment—more energy in, more critical.</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-criticism is dark.</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-criticism is unnecessary.</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-criticism challenges stagnation.</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-criticism is cerebral, not instinctual.</td>
<td>187, 165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-criticism exaggerates mistakes.</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Clustering of Meanings and Themes

The next step was to arrange the statements into clusters and themes. The Invariant Constituents were clustered into five categories: (1) the experiential, or felt, qualities of self-criticism; (2) qualities that reflect the “isness” of self-criticism, meaning qualities about self-criticism that are not structural and not experiential, but are present; (3) qualities that reflect the purpose of self-criticism; (4) the qualities that reflect the structure of self-criticism; and (5) qualities that reflect the effect of self-criticism.

It was at this stage in the data analysis process that the individual personalities of each of the participants became most striking. Obviously each person has a unique voice, but as the data analysis process developed what was remarkable was the unique style of each of the data sets. Individuality of style was not a barrier to the data analysis, but was striking nonetheless. The unique aspect of the individual interviews came full circle at the end of the process, when composite themes emerged. However, the strong individual voices were most evident at this stage of the data analysis where statements were clustered and themes emerged. Table 2 lists the Clusters for P3.

Using the words from the transcript, not direct questions related to a self-description, P3 described herself as: focused, in the moment, a survivor and adapter, different from the others, independent, not a slacker, realistic, and knowing the things she does extremely well. The most vivid statement P3 made about her experience of self-criticism was:
Table 2

Clusters: P3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experienced As</th>
<th>Experience Is</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being Afraid</td>
<td>Hidden</td>
<td>Keep Proportion</td>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>Refinement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-doubt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cyclical</td>
<td>Downgrade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dynamic</td>
<td>Erode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enduring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Self-criticism in its analytical form I think would move—it would take very full steps. It wouldn't sort of—this is quite a good image, that analytical self-criticism which is probably healthy would be like a surgeon's scalpel reshaping and perhaps even building up again whereas self-criticism in its negative form is like a saber swipe which takes—it doesn't only take the soul out but it takes out all the healthy tissue around it. (paragraph 117)

She also described a purpose of self-criticism from her experience:

I think one has things in life which are the things you really want to achieve and within dancing that might be to perform Swan Lake or to be a principal. When you finally get them, of course, now either they're not the mountain they looked like from the foothills or a bit of you suddenly says actually you've only been made a principal because there's a vacancy and they need to fill their budget for the year. You downgrade it. There's definitely a bit of me that will do that. (paragraph 141)

Through the process of starting with the transcript as a whole to lifting out horizons of the experience of self-criticism and reducing them to invariant constituents and then arranging these statements into clusters came two themes:

Clarify and Cut. These are the core themes of the experience of self-criticism for P3.
These action words, clarify and cut, were chosen to label the core themes because in this case, P3 indicated that in her experience, self-criticism had a dual purpose. One purpose was to refine her performance. She described this as being like a surgeon’s scalpel “reshaping and perhaps even building up again” and an “analytical self-criticism that is probably healthy” (paragraph 117). *Clarify,* as defined in the *American Heritage Dictionary* (Berube, 1983), is to make or become clear and pure (p. 129) and describes the “scalpel” part of P3’s experience. *Cut,* defined in the *American Heritage Dictionary* (Berube, 1983) is, in part, to cause to cease; stop and to reduce the size, amount or strength of (p. 176). This word represents a “cutting down to size,” which P3 described as a saber swipe and as a “downgrade” (paragraph 141). P3 stated, “... self-criticism in its negative form is like a saber swipe which takes—it doesn’t only take the soul out, but it takes out all of the healthy tissue around it” (paragraph 117).

The Invariant Constituents and their themes were then checked against the interview transcript for discrepancies and inconsistencies. If any Invariant Constituents or themes were inconsistent with the participants’ descriptions of their experiences they were deleted. The clusters and themes for each participant are in Appendix F.

**Individual Textural Descriptions**

The textural description describes what actually took place for the participant (Creswell, 1998, p. 55). This “what happened” is from the participant’s point of view, and the textural description is an attempt to conceptualize that experience. The
researcher writes a report which attempts to convey the "textures" (textural description) of the experience. "In the textural description of an experience nothing is omitted; every dimension or phase is granted equal attention and is included" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 78).

This portion of the data analysis produced the lengthiest documents. Textural descriptions in this study ranged from four to six pages, with three of the six at six pages in length. The sample textural description used here is based on the transcripts from two participants. In order to protect the identity of the participants, the material presented in this section has been disguised. This “participant” will be referred to as PX.

**Individual Textural Description: PX**

PX is 28 years old and started dancing when he was 6 years old. He had the type of parents who put their children into “everything going” just to see if they liked it. PX is from a large family. His mother attended dance classes. She brought all of the children along to dance classes to see if they would be interested in dance. PX’s first experience performing was not enjoyable. He was the only boy, which he found difficult. He had a pretty good idea that he wanted to go into the performing arts field, but he was also a pianist and was doing many other types of dancing, not just classical ballet. He stayed at home with his family and trained locally instead of going away to school. Then it was at about age 12 or 13 that he started realizing that he actually felt that classical ballet was what he enjoyed the most. He found ballet dancing the most challenging of everything he was doing and he was good at it. PX
joined the Royal Ballet School at age 16. He was realistic about what to expect at the School, but wasn’t sure he was good enough. He went from dancing 2 hours a day to 6 hours a day, which was exhausting, but he made so much improvement that he realized he could do it. He knew ballet was what he wanted to do. He enjoyed the training at the School. PX joined the Royal Ballet company at 18 years old. He describes his experience as a young professional as:

From being at the pinnacle of your studenthood where you’re possibly the best in your year in the best school in the country if not the continent, and then you join the company, and you are literally squashed into this little walk-on thing that you could train a chimpanzee to do, but that’s how you normally start.

At the professional level, PX is aware of his responsibility to not only satisfy the needs of the audience by giving them the best possible performance that he can give, but he is also aware of his responsibility to the choreography which is important in the company’s history and heritage.

PX attributes self-criticism to training as a dancer. In training, dancers are continually critically examining themselves. It is the way a dancer improves. PX stated:

I think what it comes down to, the question I’ve always tried to decide the difference between a sport and an art when it comes to physical art forms, is one that I can’t answer absolutely perfectly, but some of the things I’ve thought of it it’s almost like an unachievable state. There is no such thing as a perfect 10 like there is in gymnastics or winning the race. It doesn’t matter what the time is. You actually won and you got the gold. You can never actually do that. There’s always further to go, so you could never actually achieve perfection which means that basically you will always be striving more and being criticized saying well, that’s rather wonderful but if you wanted to make it even better, then this is possibly what you could do. It is a very critical level from everyone’s point of view. You’re critical about yourself and everyone else is critical about you, and that’s what makes it work. That’s how you improve.
Criticism in this context seems endless and vital for improving performance.

PX’s image of self-criticism is that of an ogre. An internal ogre that consumes self-confidence. “Even when people are happy with the way things are going or with what you’ve done and you’re not, that’s really sort of a slippery slope.”

For PX, self-criticism is about losing self-confidence, which can come as a dancer gets older and is performing less. PX’s experience of self-criticism was most intense after an injury, but he believes most dancers, because they have lived with self-criticism, and the criticism of others for so long, really from the beginning of their training, that they get used to it. “You live with it like you live with a bunion.”

Self-criticism negates complements and contributes to mood shifts. PX describes this as happening cyclically, throughout his career. PX stated:

I think you put it in a box and you try to cover it with compliments and good reviews and created roles and peer support and management support. Then when those things get a bit thin on the ground, the self-criticism rears its ugly head again basically. It comes to the fore once more. I think that’s a sort of cyclical thing throughout one’s career. I notice with myself how crazily I can shift between moods. I can come into work. Maybe I’ve read a review, for instance. I’ve read in the papers that PX’s the best thing since Vallela, and I’ve come in and am absolutely, completely happy and then there’s maybe a cast sheet on the board and I’m third cast and not second cast or something, and instantly the mood swings completely.

Self-criticism also contributes to self-doubt and feeling like an imposter. PX said:

The other very interesting thing about reviews which still remains true for me is that basically I am so doubtful of what I’m doing that if there’s 24 good reviews and one bad one, I believe the bad one. The good ones I think I fooled them. Oh yeah, I pulled the wool over their eyes basically. The bad one I think they saw through me.
Self-criticism is never static, like working all of the time trying to maintain balance. It is constant refinement and searching for perfection. PX describes self-criticism as both destructive and healthy, evaluating one’s self-against others, dreading performing, losing self-confidence, scared to go on stage, self-doubt, something that is with him all of the time, not only about dancing, but about life too, applying rigor, and a work ethic.

Training for dancers may contribute to keeping a “proportional” self-view in that dancers go back every day to being in a student role. PX said:

I think dancing is quite unique in that there is the humility of going back every day to a teaching situation, you go back to that teaching environment. You put yourself in the hands of the maestro in public. I think it’s absolutely unique.

Individual Structural Descriptions

After writing the textural description, the next step for the researcher is to compose a structural description. The purpose of this next step is to describe the same report from a different perspective.

Shifting from the “what happened” emphasis of the textural description, the structural description describes how the event took place (Creswell, 1998). “The individual structural description provides a vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience . . . ” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 135). In this step, the researcher uses reflection and imaginative variation to compose a description from a different point of view.

The researcher next reflects on his or her own description and uses imaginative variation or structural description, seeking all possible meanings.

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and divergent perspectives, varying the frames of reference about the phenomenon, and constructing a description of how the phenomenon was experienced. (Creswell, 1998, p. 150)

Moustakas points out that the textural and structural elements of the description are involved in continual relationships and cannot be totally separated. Structures underlie textures, and textures cannot be described without implicit notions of structure (Moustakas, 1994). This interlocking relationship, as Moustakas refers to it, provides some difficulty in the early stages of composition since the resulting documents have very subtle differences. However, reflection on the completed documents does demonstrate the effectiveness of the separate approaches in providing a rich total description of the experience. The following example is from the individual structural description of Participant 1 (P1).

**Individual Structural Description: P1**

Self-criticism is making a mistake (or knowing what you have done is not right), then you become self-critical and worry about making the same mistake. P1 stated:

> You’ve got to think this is the right moment. You might be right or you might be wrong. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred I know I’m right, but there’s always that one time you think no, that was early, that was late. The thing to do—if you dwell on it a lot, then that can undermine your own confidence so being sort of overly critical I don’t think is that helpful. (paragraph 85)

The important part is knowing what is right and wrong because the worst thing that could happen is not knowing you’ve made a mistake and someone else does. P1 stated:
I think it's safe to say that if I didn't get something quite right, the most aware I am is of what my colleagues are thinking. Again, it's an awareness of their criticism as well as mine because I know I’ve got it wrong. I'm also very conscious that they know I’ve got it wrong, too. I think that's probably an orchestra-wide thing. If it sort of has an image, it's their hearing me make a mistake. I think the worst thing, of course, is when you don't know you've made a mistake and one comes and tells you. (paragraph 184)

Summary Structural descriptions for each participant are in Appendix G.

Individual Textural-Structural Description

Moustakas' (1994) last step for the individual data sets is to create a textural-structural description. “Construct for each research participant a Textural-Structural Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes” (p. 121). The textural-structural description combines elements of both the individual textural description and the individual structural description. These individual textural-structural descriptions form the basis for the composite description of the meanings and essences of the experience, which will serve to represent the whole. The sample textural description used here is based on the transcripts from two participants.

Individual Textural-Structural Description: PX

PX most strongly described her experience of self-criticism as losing your nerve. She stated, “I think the danger is losing your nerve because you do have to be quite confident in what you do.” She also described self-criticism as being wrong. She also described her self-critical experience as losing confidence, fear of embarrassment by making a mistake and not knowing it, and feeling insecure. She
described self-criticism as a sequence of experiences: mistake made—self-critical thoughts—worry—make another mistake. This sequence is self-perpetuating. The purpose of self-criticism is to be preemptive of further criticism from others. She stated:

I think it’s safe to say that if I didn’t get something quite right, the most aware I am is of what my colleagues are thinking. Again, it’s an awareness of their criticism as well as mine because I know I’ve got it wrong. I’m also very conscious that they know I’ve got it wrong, too. I think the worst thing, of course, is when you don’t know you’ve made a mistake and one comes and tell you.

The themes evident in PX’s experience of self-criticism are precision (not being wrong) and courage (not losing one’s nerve).

Moving from this example of a textural-structural description, the next step in the Moustakas methodology is to bring the data together in a move toward synthesis of the experience. The next section will show the composite themes and will be followed the composite textural description.

Composite Themes

The individual themes are intimately connected to the individual performers and how they have lived their lives. Because the identity of the individual participants needs to be protected, the findings are summarized as a composite.

The composite themes, which were revealed, are lost and longing, clarify and cut, unchanging and unavoidable, precision, courage, balance, and restraint.
Composite Textural Descriptions

A composite textural description combines the elements of the textural description from each of the participants. "The invariant meanings and themes of every co-researcher are studied in depicting the experiences of the group as a whole" (Moustakas, 1994, p.138).

In this step, each of the six separate textural description documents was reread. Again the process included reflection, imagination, and intuition in creating the composite document. The following composite textural description is based on the sample style as presented in Moustakas (1994) and attempts to present a synopsis of the experience as revealed through the individual textural descriptions.

Composite Textural Description

The six participants in the study were professional performing artists: one musician and five dancers. All of the participants were under contract with the Royal Opera House and Ballet. Of the five dancers, two were also choreographers. Three of the dancers joined the Royal Ballet School at age 11 and two joined the Royal Ballet School at age 16. The participants included four men and two women. The age range of the participants was 25 to 33. All of the participants were from England. Two were from the metropolitan London area, which is where the Royal Opera House and Royal Ballet and the Royal Ballet School are located. Three were from more rural areas of the country.
All of the participants talked about the significant amount of support they received as children from their parents for their involvement in dance or music training. P2 stated:

They didn’t go without, but it must have been a struggle because they have seven children and it must have been a big struggle. Of course, they tried to give all of us something of what we wanted to do, so they gave up a lot of things that they could have given to themselves.

P5 said, “It was sort of my mum really that was a dance mother. My parents basically just put us into everything to see what we enjoyed doing.” P5 stated:

There are many opportunities between the ages of 12 and 18 to stray or to lose focus and think why am I doing this (dancing)? I don’t want to do this today. They (my parents) were there and they kind of pushed me or encouraged me or whatever they had to do, they did. I don’t believe that there have been many professional dancers or certainly ballet dancers who didn’t have the support of a parent or both parents behind them or someone because it’s a tough life for a very young start basically. (paragraph 89)

The dancers started dance classes when they were 2 and a half, 3, 6, or 8 years old. One dancer started dancing “before she could walk.” The musician started music lessons at age 9.

All of the dancers attended the Royal Ballet School. P3 stated, “If you’re going to be a ballet dancer, it’s the Royal Ballet School or nothing. It did have this sort of ‘air.’ People have written books about getting into the Royal Ballet School. It’s sort of a children’s comic dream” (paragraph 39). The Royal Ballet School is a boarding school. Children audition at age 10 and a half and if accepted, start at age 11. There is also an Upper School, which admits students for 2 years of training starting at age 16. A third year of training is sometimes offered to students. Students at the Upper School live independently in London, while studying at the Royal Ballet.
School. One or two dancers are selected each year from the School and offered a contract with the Royal Ballet.

P4 described his experience at the Royal Ballet School:

I thought going to a boarding school—I’d come decided that that’s what I wanted to do, and my parents quite happily went along with that, and I thought it’d be all midnight feast and bits of dancing. It turned out, unfortunately, to be more like Auschwitz. It was a horror. I found it—some people say they enjoyed it, but I’ve not met anybody that actually went through it that didn’t—that doesn’t still have some kind of quirk. (paragraph 73)

P3 said, “The teaching methods were old fashioned English. Basically you beat people” (paragraph 53). P6 stated her experience of the Upper School of the Royal Ballet School was mixed.

I’m very, very happy that I went there. There were some great aspects to it and some not-so-great aspects. I think the great things were being in London, the experience of leaving home, the people that I met, some of the teachers, the choreographic teachers were wonderful, some of the academic teachers. Somehow I managed to get quite a few supporters that weren’t strict ballet stuff. My ballet teachers were not so supportive and if they weren’t exactly destructive, they weren’t far off. They obviously helped in terms of my ballet training because I’m sure I improved those 2 years, but I think I lost a lot of confidence. (paragraph 39)

Other descriptions of their training experiences were, that is was “like being under a microscope,” that it was like “continually auditioning,” that they were isolated, not in charge of their own life, felt vulnerable, didn’t have the security of home, and felt “scared to death.” P3 stated she felt “happy to be in an environment that would carry me along to my ultimate goal to be a ballet dancer” (paragraph 57). P4 said the intense training experience made it possible for him “to resolve a lot of stuff early on—who I am kind of stuff, because at 16, I was going to conquer London and I did my best” (paragraph 101).
All of the performers experienced self-criticism as losing confidence. P1 stated:

You’ve got to think this is the right moment. You might be right or you might be wrong. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred I know I’m right, but there’s always that one time you think no, that was early, that was late. The thing to do—if you dwell on it a lot, then that can undermine your own confidence so being sort of overly critical I don’t think is that helpful. (paragraph 85).

All of the performers experienced self-criticism as being afraid. This aspect of self-criticism was described by P2, “There’s a like a fear that settled in or something. It settled in and it’s there all the time” (paragraph 327). It is also about fear of being “found out.” P2 stated, “Everyone thinks I’m a really confident person” (paragraph 345).

Some of the participants described being afraid of embarrassment and humiliation, and others described using self-criticism as a way to preempt criticism from other people.

The self-critical experience was also described by three of the participants as “being wrong.” For example, P5 stated:

Because there is a standard, I would be far more embarrassed and self critical of myself than if I went up there and somebody wasn’t very convinced of my particular interpretation of a role because I just didn’t do it for them. That was my interpretation and I wouldn’t be—I would be able to argue about that I believe that I was doing what I was doing. But if I did something wrong, then I would be very self critical of myself. (paragraph 165)

The participants’ descriptions of self-criticism also included being alone, being helpless, being insecure, losing your nerve, emotional self-battery, and self-doubt. The images the participants used to describe their experience of self-criticism included: “a dark box around you—quite close to you,” an ogre, a surgeon’s scalpel.
and a saber, "something hanging over you chopping you in," a "slippery slope," and the image of "my colleagues listening to me."

In summary, the "textures" of the participants' experiences of self-criticism were varied. The experiences of self-criticism as both losing confidence and being afraid were shared by all of the performers. The following section will describe the structure of the self-critical experience.

**Composite Structural Descriptions**

In writing the composite structural description, the technique of Imaginative Variation is used to try to construct a description of the essential themes of the experience. "The aim is to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98).

Again, this document is based on the six individual structural descriptions and is composed in an effort to remain true to the essences of those documents. As is true with the individual textural descriptions and structural descriptions, there is only a subtle difference between the documents and at first they may seem repetitive. Nevertheless there is a different focus, and the composite structural description seeks to convey the essence of "how" the phenomenon was experienced by all the participants. The following section is the composite structural description for this study.
Composite Structural Description

Self-criticism was experienced by all of the participants as perpetual. P3 described this aspect as:

I think you put it in a box and you try to cover it with compliments and good reviews and created roles and peer support and management support. Then when those things get a bit thin on the ground, the self-criticism rears its ugly head again basically. It comes to the fore once more. I think that's a sort of cyclical thing throughout one's career. (paragraph 65)

This is a description of a pattern that happens over the course of a career. The self-critical pattern described by three other participants was narrower: making a mistake-fear-losing confidence-mistake (P1, P2, P4).

Self-criticism is also self-perpetuating. P1 stated, "It's my own fault because I do it to myself" (P2). It's something one "puts onto one's self" (P4).

The experience of self-criticism was described by four of the participants as inner and/or hidden. "Most people think I am a very confident person" (P2).

Self-criticism is not only about dancing, but about other aspects of one's life. For example saying you yourself, "I haven't done enough today on that paper" (P3).

Self-criticism is with you all the time. "I think I am probably constantly self-critical as I think most dancers are" (P3).

Self-criticism is the basis for improvement, a process through which one learns. It is about wanting to know more, "What was good about my performance?, What was bad?, Why was it good or bad?" (P5).

Self-criticism is about thinking, which gets in the way of instincts and just "doing" (P5). "To me, self-critical is quite an intellectual process" (P3).
Structurally, self-criticism was experienced by all of the participants as perpetual (or enduring/unstoppable). It was experienced by four of the participants as self-perpetuating, hidden, and constant. Additional aspects of the structure of self-criticism described by the participants include: basis for improvement, is about thinking, and is a dialogue.

The effects of self-criticism were that it exaggerated mistakes (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5), increased vulnerability (P1, P2), was downgrading (P3), was eroding (P3), challenged stagnation (P3, P6), was confining (P4, P5), promoted improvement (P1), and was refining (P3).

The purpose of self-criticism was to control (P2), to limit (P2), to be a foundation (P5), to be a way to communicate expertise (P5), to keep proportion (P3), and unnecessary (P4).

The last step in the phenomenological method data analysis process is to provide a synthesis of the data and establish the essences of the experience. This final step involves “the intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p.100).

**Composite Textural-Structural Description: Essences of the Experience**

By following the phenomenological reduction process as outlined by Moustakas (1994), the following four aspects of the experience of the research participants were determined to be the essences of their experience. Each of these
aspects is a part of every participant’s report and constituted the major findings of this study.

The first aspect was Losing Confidence. Each of the participants discussed in some way losing confidence. It was most simply expressed as “I can’t do this.” Other words used by the participants to describe this aspect of self-criticism were insecure, self-doubt, and unsure.

The second aspect of self-criticism common to all participants was Fear. It was most simply described as “losing one’s nerve.” They described being afraid of embarrassment and humiliation, afraid of the critical comments of others, and being afraid of being “found out.”

These two textural aspects of self-criticism, Losing Confidence and Fear, were also linked to each other in a Pattern of Thinking that was one of the essential structural aspects of self-criticism. The participants described this pattern as making a mistake (or knowing what you’ve done is not right), then losing confidence (or are self-critical) and then being afraid about making the same mistake again. This Pattern of Thinking is the third aspect of the self-critical experience common to all of the participants.

Lastly, the participants described self-criticism in some way that implied it was Unending. “You live with it like you live with a bunion.” Other words used by the participants to describe this fourth aspect were: unstoppable, vicious circle, endure, and constant.

Moustakas (1994) said that searching for the essences of an experience is never completed. “The fundamental textural-structural synthesis represents the
essences at a particular time and place from the vantage point of an individual researcher following an exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon” (p. 100).

The experience of the performing artists who were participants in this study was captured in a series of interviews, which were analyzed according to the phenomenological reduction process. The resulting synthesis is a single expression of a complex event, but one that clearly demonstrates the essence of the self-critical experience for these six performing artists.

The final chapter includes a summary of the study, a comparison of the findings from this study with the extant literature, a report of the limitations of the method and findings, a description of the evaluative criteria for qualitative studies, implications for future research and outcomes of the study.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The original intent of this study was to expand the knowledge of performing artists' experiences of self-criticism. Six professional performing artists were interviewed in an effort to understand, from their perspective, their experiences of self-criticism. The phenomenological question, which seeks to understand the essence of the experience, was a perfect mode of exploration for this question. Within this phenomenological research paradigm, the Moustakas (1994) technique proved to be an excellent tool for analysis. Each step in the process built directly toward revelation of essence through synthesis.

Given the autobiographical character of the Moustakas (1994) methodology, it is important to compare initial intuitive reactions to the interviews with the results of the formal analysis process from the transcripts. After each interview, the researcher jotted down phrases that represented how the performing artist experienced self-criticism. Those notes and the essences presented in the Composite Textural-Structural Description are similar. However, the conceptualization of self-criticism that was the product of the data analysis process truly captures the essence of the experience in a way that the notes did not. The researcher’s initial notes reflected the catchy phrases and the expressions of those aspects of self-criticism that
confirmed prior experiences and beliefs. The researcher made an effort to look for horizons of the self-critical experience that contradicted personal experience.

An essence can be said to be “an extract that has the fundamental properties of a substance in concentrated form” (American Heritage Dictionary, Berube, 1983, p. 465). Finding the horizons of the experience, creating invariant constituents from the horizons, and using imaginative variation to compose descriptions of the experience all fed directly into the ability to lift out, name, and describe the universal qualities of the participants’ experience. The essences of the experiences exposed through this method of analysis were (a) self-criticism as Losing Confidence, (b) self-criticism as Fear, (c) self-criticism as a Pattern of Thinking, and (d) self-criticism as an Unending experience.

The research methodology of Clark Moustakas (1994) was carefully followed and included steps of bracketing, phenomenological data reduction, and imaginative variation. In addition, the presentation format of the report is based on Moustakas’ recommendations.

This method toward an analysis of qualitative data was long and frequently frustrating. Quantitative data from numerical responses would have been much easier to tabulate and report. However, approaching the research questions in this study with quantitative methods would not have allowed the depth of responses from the participants. “Qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive methods, always seeking better way to make more understandable the worlds of experience that have been studied” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 12). For
the phenomenological research question in this study, the Moustakas (1994) strategy of inquiry has been an excellent fit.

Comparison of Findings With Current Literature

There are some similarities and some striking differences between the essences of the experience of these six participants and the comments from the literature reviewed in this study. In this section the findings of this study will be discussed in the context of the literature. The results of this study will be compared with the psychological literature, specifically Freud’s concept of the superego (Freud, 1923/1989), self-criticism as a component of depression (Beck, 1987; Birchnell, 1984; Blatt, 1974; Blatt et al., 1976), self-criticism and anger ((Spielberger, 1991) and the cognitive-behavioral explanation of self-criticism as an internal sabotaging agency (Elliott, 1992). Additionally, two aspects of giftedness (Neihart, 1998; Tolan, 1994) and training in the arts (Gedo, 1996; Salmon & Meyer, 1992) will be compared to the findings of this study.

Self-criticism and the Superego

Several of the participants in this study described self-criticism as a self-regulatory agent. For one participant, self-criticism “cut her down to size” so she wouldn’t get a “big head.” For another participant, self-criticism was described as “being in balance,” which takes continual readjusting to maintain. The unending aspect of the self-critical pattern exposed in this study is consistent with the
psychoanalytic viewpoint that the purpose of self-criticism is to maintain psychic equilibrium.

Babikian (1985), who addressed the functioning of the superego specifically in professional performers, concluded in part that the superego helped performers to maintain the discipline and deprivation needed to perform at a professional level. The necessity for self-criticism to be part of discipline was not supported by all of the participants. Two participants described self-criticism as unnecessary. Those participants who described self-criticism as necessary viewed it as a way to improve or refine their performances. The participants in this study did not express Babikian’s (1985) notion of deprivation, which was about the amount of time the performers devoted to practicing. However, several participants did describe being and feeling isolated, which may be similar to deprivation. The participants who attended the Royal Ballet School at a younger age described being literally isolated, in that the School is outside London, away from the Royal Opera House and Royal Ballet at Covent Garden. They also described feeling isolated from their families.

**Self-criticism as a Component of Depression**

One of the most salient features in the comparison between the current psychological literature and this study is the view that self-criticism is, in a variety of ways, a “vulnerability marker” (Blatt, 1974, p. 107) for depression. However, none of the participants in describing their experiences of self-criticism mentioned depression.
One participant described his most intensely self-critical experience as “the negativity.” He did not, however imply depression *per se* and the tenor of his experience overall included feelings of vulnerability and helplessness. None of the other participants mentioned experiences of depression.

This may be because the participants in this study are the successful exemplars. The psychological literature on depression tends to focus on pathology. The participants in this study are perhaps the “exception to the rule.” Future investigations of self-critical experiences of persons who received the same training as the participants in this study and were not successful as professional performers would be interesting and might provide a closer match to the current literature on depression and self-criticism.

Because the participants in this study have experienced self-criticism and are successful in their performing careers, the descriptions of how they have navigated their experiences of self-criticism is valuable.

**Self-criticism and Anger**

With regard to anger, the literature suggests that highly self-critical persons are preoccupied with anger (Spielberger, 1991). This was not evident in the present study. There may, however, be some differences in the nuance of British expression of anger that was not translated to this researcher.
Cognitive-Behavioral Explanation of Self-criticism

Self-criticism was experienced as an internal sabotaging agency both as an internal dialogue and as a pattern that is like a “self-fulfilling prophecy,” which is closely related to the pattern identified in this study. For example, one participant described the pattern as “I think I am going to make a mistake, then I make a mistake” (P2).

Salmon and Meyer (1992) address the issue of self-criticism specifically in musicians and emphasize the effect patronizing compliments have on self-criticism, the use of self-criticism by musicians to “beat other people to the punch,” and the use of self-criticism to communicate expertise. All of these aspects of self-criticism were expressed by at least one performer. They were not, however, common to all of the performers. Salmon and Meyer do not mention losing confidence, a pattern connected to self-criticism, or the unending aspect of self-criticism. They do discuss fear in relation to performance anxiety and perfectionism, but not self-criticism.

Self-criticism and Giftedness

In the literature on giftedness, self-esteem problems and a sense of self lost were identified as characteristics related to self-criticism in gifted children. One participant in this study stated she believed all dancers have low self-esteem due to the very young age at which they start training. She said:

In my experience, dancers really are destructively self-critical. They have almost to a man, they have extremely low self-esteem, and I do think it roots back to that method of teaching where you’re told that’s dreadful, that’s dreadful, why can’t you do it this way. I think if you’re saying that to young
dancers who actually have no sense of themselves as people, they’re pre-adolescents actually, they’re 11, they haven’t formed any beliefs about themselves as people, let alone as dancers, and so to be constantly hammering home that negative message I do think stays with them for a very long time. (P3, paragraph 55)

This description is not of a self “lost,” but of a self that is not there yet. The only description of a “loss of self” was in the context of a dancer losing her “dancer self” or identity as her dance career is ending.

The descriptions of the participants’ experiences of self-criticism are closest to the points made in the literature on training in the arts. The aspect of critical learning in arts training and a pattern of self-assessment, based on critical learning, that can lead to negative self-evaluations were evident in the participants’ descriptions of their experiences. The literature however does not explicitly address the essences of the self-critical experience revealed in this study. The participants’ descriptions of their training were poignant and this seems to be ‘fertile ground’ for further research.

Implications of the Study

While the essences of the experience of self-criticism in performing artists revealed in this study were very informative, there were also some questions raised in the study. For example, “How much does the training received by performing artists contribute to their experience of self-criticism?” and “What aspects of their training were most significant?” The experiences of performing arts students who do not pursue a performance career would be useful in rounding out this study. Research
involving professional performing artists trained in the United States would broaden the findings. Specific ideas for future studies are as follows:

1. Expand this study. Using the same methodology and the same research question, interview those students who received training in the performing arts, but do not pursue a performing arts career. At the same time, seek out students from the United States and other countries that are training to become professional performers. Maintain an awareness of any variance in responses based on cultural differences. Interview dancers who are professionals in contemporary forms of dance (modern, jazz, contemporary ballet) and interview musicians.

2. Expand the method. Using the same research question and the same basic phenomenological research method, expand the inquiry by adding a multidimensional format to the presentation of the findings. A film documentary of the self-critical experiences of these participants in the context of their training, performances and careers and personal lives would be the best available venue for presenting their experience. The data analysis process used in this study would be an excellent framework for a film documentary.

3. Redirect the research question. Using the Moustakas (1994) phenomenological research methodology, investigate other aspects of performing artists' experience. The methodology has proven to be a very successful tool for planning and organizing, this type of research question. Two possibilities would be to study performing artists' experiences of being a professional, or of the performance experience itself.
Limitations

In qualitative research, the evaluative criteria are, in part, determined by the skill and experience of the researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994). One of the limitations of this study is the researcher's inexperience in conducting qualitative research.

Another limitation of this study is that it lacks a qualitative historical model or precedent. A previous qualitative approach to studying self-criticism has not been encountered.

Maintaining confidentiality of the participants, while at the same time trying to present a viable, contextual example of the data analysis process was difficult. The unique aspects of each performing artists' experience are diminished in this report. A detailed portrait of each performer is necessarily missing from this presentation of the data analysis method.

Evaluative Criteria

Generalization beyond the individual participants in this study is not appropriate, although further cases that are similar to those already researched may be "conceptually generalizable." The researcher may be able to use his or her knowledge in understanding cases that are similar to those already researched, as does the practitioner in day-to-day clinical practice. (Buston, Perry-Jones, Livingston, Bogan, & Wood, 1998, p. 198)

The applicable qualitative question is, "Will the knowledge gained from this study be transferable?"
Dependability is based on the researcher keeping clear records of the research process and its products, in order that, in principle at least, the study can be replicated (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Confirmability refers to having confidence in the findings. Active seeking and inclusion of negative evidence and contradictory findings should be considered before final conclusions are reached. The use of more than one data source and type of data should increase confidence in the research (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Finally, credibility refers to the internal validity of a study. Do the findings make sense? Providing sufficient descriptive information about the study method and the findings will help the reader judge its credibility (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Recommendations

Applications for Clinical Practice

One of the anticipated outcomes of this study was to apply the information gained to a clinical context. The concept of the superego and its self-regulatory purpose can be useful in treating performing artists. Helping performing arts clients to articulate the role their superego plays in their psychic life and in training in their art could diminish the negative effects of self-criticism. The experiences of the performers in this study suggest counselors and therapists communicate to their clients the predictable aspects of self-criticism: it serves a purpose and it is unending. This would “normalize” the experience of self-criticism for the performers and they
may be less likely to attribute the negative emotions associated with an intensely self-critical experience to personal pathology.

The viewpoint that self-criticism is an internal sabotaging agency (Elliott, 1992) could be useful in addressing the cognitive aspects of the self-critical experience. In this study a pattern related to the experience of self-criticism was exposed. Helping clients to become more aware of their patterns of thinking and behaving that are related to self-criticism would enhance feelings of control and in turn increase self-confidence.

Performing takes courage. There is always the danger of “losing one’s nerve” or of having a “fear settle in.” Counselors can help performing arts clients recognize not only their fear, but also their courage. At those moments in therapy, when clients look directly at intense emotions, they develop a kind of courage to see themselves as they are. Performing artists can use the courage they exhibit in performance as a template for the risk taking that is involved in the therapy experience.

Counselors working with performing artists could encounter self-critical experiences in their clients in a variety of ways. Some of the participants’ descriptions of how they dealt with self-criticism could be helpful.

First, four participants dealt with self-criticism by laughing at it or themselves. One participant (P3) said, “This is dance, it’s not brain surgery!” They also laughed at themselves and they laughed together. P1 stated, “We often get criticized for actually laughing if something goes wrong, but that sort of releases the tension—you let the player off if something goes wrong. Nobody puts in bad notes deliberately. It’s always an accident” (paragraph 65).
Second, five of the participants recommended having a life outside of their career. This was especially true for the dancers. One participant (P5) said:

It’s also a little bit frightening as well because some people live in that world and that is their world literally. There is no other world. I think at the moment at the Royal Ballet company, there are quite a few people who have families and lives outside, but the last generation of dancers—those dancers literally gave their all. They gave it their life and their world and their everything to dance, and they have nothing and no one else. I think it’s changed for the moment. Who knows, it might change back again. It is a bit worrying because you can get quite enclosed. (paragraph 64)

Next the participants described cognitive strategies they used to deal with self-criticism. These were: to have realistic expectations, to override yourself, to think clearly, to focus on what you are doing and not on who’s watching, and to not linger on obvious mistakes because you’re not likely to repeat them.

Behaviorally, the participants described working on a single element and improving it and getting a different perspective by teaching someone else as ways to deal with self-criticism. Other characteristics of self-criticism described by two participants were (a) that experience decreases self-criticism, and (b) that routine decreases self-criticism.

This collection of statements is very broad and covers a range of options in dealing with self-criticism. In their present form they are anecdotal bits of advice. A systematic study and presentation of how performers deal with self-criticism is recommended for future investigation.
Applications for Training Performing Artists

Another consequence of this study is to recommend that teachers support a performing arts student's confidence. It is possible to make necessary corrections, communicate a tradition of excellence, and strive for an idealistic standard of perfection, while at the same time supporting a student's sense of confidence.

The participants' descriptions of how they deal with self-criticism offer some clues as to how to achieve this. First, provide specific and detailed feedback. Performers want to know What was good?, What was bad?, and Why was the performance good or bad?. Second, balance is important. Providing only criticism is rude and hurtful. There needs to be balance in feedback given to students.

An analogy for how teachers in the arts might address the losing confidence aspect of self-criticism is how medical personnel in an emergency room deal with the emotional needs of their patients. When a patient comes into an emergency room, in a crisis, and feels vulnerable and afraid, one of the most productive responses the staff makes is to support the patient's ego. Statements like, "You can do this," and giving the patient a sense of mastery or control in the situation are effective in building self-confidence in an intense situation.

Another suggestion is to point out those aspects of students' performances that are consistently good. One participant dealt with the critical training environment she was in by always knowing there were things she could do exceptionally well.
Lastly, teachers are less likely to diminish other’s confidence if they become more conscious of their own experiences of self-criticism.

Presented in this study were the essences of the self-critical experiences of six professional performing artists. The findings are applicable to both clinical and educational settings that are geared toward performing artists.

The inspiration for this study was a music student’s response to an assignment on self-critical experiences. The student’s vivid description of an intense experience resonated with the researcher’s own experiences of self-criticism. On this level, the purpose of this study was to provide a personal perspective for the researcher and some potential relief for those professional performing artists and performing arts students who are intensely self-critical. The findings, which identified self-criticism as (a) losing confidence, (b) being afraid, (c) a pattern of thinking, and (d) as an unending experience, are the essences common to the participants’ experiences of self-criticism. These findings suggest potentially important attitudes and directions to be taken by both clinicians and teachers who work with professional performing artists and performing arts students. These include: communicating to performing artists in a clinical context the perpetual, self-regulatory purpose of self-criticism; identifying and challenging the pattern of thinking associated with self-criticism; and recognizing not only the fear, but also the courage involved in performance. In an educational or training context, the attitudes and directions indicated by the findings of this study are to support students’ confidence by (a) providing specific and detailed feedback, (b) balancing critical
comments with noncritical comments, and (c) encouraging student self-awareness of strengths in performance.

Future studies on how performers deal with self-criticism and on which specific aspects of their training experiences contribute to their experience of self-criticism are needed. Other areas for future inquiry would be to study performing artists' experiences of being a professional and of the performance experience itself. Building on the questions raised by this study, future studies could investigate self-confidence, specifically how confidence is developed and diminished in performing artists.
Appendix A

Protocol Clearance From the Human Subjects
Institutional Review Board
Date: 10 November 2000

To: John Geisler, Principal Investigator
   Rosemary Hakes, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Sylvia Culp, Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 00-09-16

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled “Self-criticism as Experienced by Performing Artists: A Phenomenological Study” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: 10 November 2001
Appendix B

Consent Document
I have been asked to participate in a dissertation research project entitled "Self-criticism as Experienced by Performing Artists: A Phenomenological Study". The purpose of this research is to describe and document the essence and nature of self-criticism for performing artists. Self-criticism refers to the act of making self-judgements and evaluations. Ms. Rosemary Hakes is conducting this project as her dissertation research under the supervision of Dr. John Geisler.

My consent to participate in this project indicates that I will take part in one individual interview that will last approximately 90 minutes. Rosemary Hakes will conduct this interview either face to face or by telephone. I am aware that this interview will be audiotaped and transcribed. Additionally, I will take part in a data check in which I will be sent the transcript of the interview and asked to review the transcript and make any additional comments and corrections, and an exit interview. The exit interview will be conducted either face to face or by telephone.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. If an accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken; however, no compensation or additional treatment will be made available to the participant except as otherwise stated in this consent form. The researcher anticipates minimal risk involved with my participation. If, however, I experience discomfort as a result of sharing my experience, the researcher will arrange a referral to a professional counselor or psychologist. Should I choose to engage in counseling for this purpose, the cost of counseling will be my responsibility.

I may benefit from participation in this study by becoming more aware of my experience of self-criticism. By sharing my experience, I may help to add to the understanding of self-criticism and its role in the lives of performing artists.

All of the information collected from me is confidential. My name or any other identifying characteristics will not appear on any taped or transcribed material. Any identifying characteristics within the interview material will be removed or disguised to protect my identity.

Since participation is voluntary, I may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or prejudice or effect on my relationship with Western Michigan University. If I have any questions or concerns about this study, I may contact either Rosemary Hakes (616) 345-9511 or Dr. John Geisler (616) 387-5110. The participant may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (616) 387-8293, or the Vice President for Research (616) 387-8298 if questions or problems arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Subjects should not sign this document if the corner does not show a stamped date and signature. My signature below indicates that I am aware of the purpose of this study and the requirements for my participation as explained to me.

Signature
Date
Consent witnessed
Appendix C

Interview Guide
Interview Guide

Please describe for me as completely and clearly as you can an experience during the last year when you felt the most intensely self-critical.

What most exemplifies self-criticism for you?

What role does self-criticism play in your life?

What does your self-critical experience look like, sound like, move like?

What meanings do these representations of your experience of self-criticism have for you?

How did you first become aware of being self-critical?

Can you describe what you felt like?

Can you recall what it was like for you as you were beginning (or ending) your performance?

"Is there anything else that you would like to add that we haven’t already addressed?"
Appendix D

Horizons of the Experience
5. It can be, especially if you’ve got a player who get a little bit worried about what they’ve got to do. I think that’s probably the most unnerving experience when I’m performing is if I know somebody is a little bit uncomfortable with the music they’ve got to play and I’m sort of half listening to him and sort of thinking is he going to be all right as well as trying to concentrate on my own business. That’s I suppose what’s being a section principal is about, is trying to sort of encourage your team.

59. Like tonight I was thinking sometimes I’ll play something. I’ll think no, that was too loud or that was too soft and it’s also I was thinking of that in the relationship with how I manage, managing the section. If I’m not quite comfortable with the way somebody is playing something, before I sort of used to just shout across saying that’s too loud. I think that wasn’t terribly helpful and so, being sort of self critical of that, I know have a quiet way that’s less embarrassing to them to correct them, if you like. The playing, though, it’s knowing where to stop the self-criticism and have the confidence that you are going to get it right. A lot of players who get nervous, of course, it’s not so much in my view that they’re getting less able. It’s just that their self-criticism and their awareness of how difficult it is to get a particular note or phrase right so that you’ve reached almost a new level. Certainly I think the older you get, obviously you get a slight physical deterioration.

61. It’s the muscles basically. You’ll find the neck muscles might be stiffer as you get older. I suppose it’s a little bit the nerves. I’m trying to think of the right phrase. I’m not saying you get the shakes or anything like that, but your ability to keep your hands steady and confident like that does tend to seem to get a little bit worse as you get older, whether that’s combined with the realization that possibly you’ve been doing it wrong for 80 years. I shudder to think of things that I used to do even 10 or 15 years ago, the way I played things then. I think oh, that was just dreadful, but I was quite pleased with it at the time.

63. Our big problem often in the opera house orchestra particularly is that we’ll get a downbeat from the conductor. Yet the orchestra won’t play because the singer hasn’t finished their phrase and we always go with the singer, much to the conductor’s annoyance. Sometimes if that doesn’t go quite right, maybe you come in a little bit early. It might only be a fraction of a second but still you know it’s not right. That’s where you can become terribly self-critical and start almost worrying about it.

65. Again, that’s something you have to be very professional about and not let it do so. We often get sometimes criticized for actually laughing if something goes wrong, but that sort of releases the tension so we’re always—you let the player
off if something goes wrong. Nobody puts in bad notes deliberately. It’s always an accident.

95. That’s the worst part of being a principal. I’m sort of conscious of my colleagues’ worries.

71. I know some section principals who sort of maybe try a little bit more bluster. I don’t believe that’s terribly helpful and again, at the end of the day my responsibilities are to deliver a decent performance to the audience. It is a product delivery. However we get that, I think encouragement is the best way forward rather than trying to do it by fear. Having been in the army, I know what that fear is.

81. If it’s gone wrong, I might just run over in my mind what did go wrong and what steps, if there are steps to be taken, I can take to put it right. I don’t tend to sort of linger too much on obvious mistakes, things I’m likely to do again. I think after a period of time in the opera house, you do stop making really dreadful mistakes. You get sort of a sixth sense before you do that. At least that’s what you hope.

83. It happens like every day or so many days a week, and somehow the routine of it has maybe diminished the criticalness or a destructiveness criticalness or something. Maybe gets rid of the destructive criticalness. I still do listen very carefully to what I perform and I think everybody in the orchestra does that.

85. I think the danger is losing your nerve because you do have to be sort of quite confident in what you do, bringing a pair of cymbals together, for example. You’ve got to think this is the right moment. You might be right or you might be wrong. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred I know I’m right, but there’s always that one time you think no, that was early, that was late. The thing to do—if you dwell on it a lot, then that can undermine your own confidence so being sort of overly critical I don’t think is that helpful. The one difference we have compared to other symphony orchestras is we’re performing all the time. We rehearse maybe during the daytime but every night—we’re doing like six performances. Every week we’re doing six performances, or seven or eight. Now most symphony orchestras would do like three concerts in that time which may be three concerts of identical repertoire. We do six which is something different every night.

87. Yes, having done both, I can say there is certainly a difference. The opera house orchestra compared to another orchestra I play with, the Philharmonia, the Philharmonia hit the ground running at the first rehearsal and they basically then keyed themselves up for the concert. I found with the opera house orchestra we’ve got so many more performances, the rehearsals tend to function at a slightly less frantic pace. We’ll pace ourselves much more so that we’ve still got
energy left at the end of an evening. Also, another point is symphony concerts tend to be only two hours, and our performances can be three to six hours long. Again, the criticism during that time, you can only keep correcting yourself so much and you are actually slightly more understanding of people’s problems in the opera house orchestra because of the incessant nature of the repertoire every night of something new, whether it’s it ballet, whether it’s opera. We do, we tend to have rehearsed it quite extensively by the time it gets to performance.

94. Sometimes in the past we’ve all sort of done disastrous things and the first thing you want to do is run off stage. I think when you’re part of a group like an orchestra—of course, you have to remember it’s only maybe one note out of maybe a million.

97. I had a very bad experience and I became very, very self-critical of how I was doing in the music profession generally. I sort of end up questioning myself.

100. I had a conversation the other day just about what I do. It was a coach drive actually and I don’t know that he’s sort of connected with the arts and he said there are not many people who get to do what you do and it made me realize that and I asked the other players in the symphony, how many people have actually done the job I do this century and we couldn’t come up with more than six people. So you think that’s really rather good, isn’t it? Six people in Britain are the only people who have done the job that I do at the moment. That made me sort of stop and think yeah, I am actually quite lucky, despite all the frustrations of being in the performing arts. We musicians are the first to grumble and moan, but could say well, go and do something else, but they’ll oh no, I really like it.

102. There’s not so many people in the opera house orchestra that suffer from this. It’s probably because if they were that sort of neurotic, we wouldn’t appoint them in the first place because they wouldn’t last longer than about six months in a job. There’s one or two previous occupants of my job who had gotten very neurotic and also did talk themselves of the job. They had an inner voice, if you like, which was nagging them.

104. What keeps me from doing that is, I think, the self-discipline. It’s almost like the knowledge of having seen the destruction that these colleagues have actually brought upon themselves and it’s possibly it’s just not my frame of mind. I’m sort of quite critical about my own qualities, but not to the extent that I couldn’t actually sit down and do it. I’ve come close to that a couple of times. I’ve gotten very nervous about something, knowing that it’s probably right on the edge of my technical ability.

106. Again, these people sort of stopped themselves playing Swan Lake or something like that which was very much a routine part of our job. Again, I’m sort of
wondering if it’s just sort of a mind set that kind of kicks in. It’s possibly how
secure you are in yourself, I would imagine. I think we all sort of give the veneer
of security but most people I end up having personal discussions with will admit
that they think that they will eventually be found out.

108. This applies to the lowliest violin right up to the top level and sometimes the
people at the top have more of that because the expectations are much greater up
there, aren’t they? You’re only as good as your last performance at that level.

114. I do try and sort of observe my relationship with other members of the human
race, in as much that sometimes I might be a bit brisk with somebody or
something like that and I tend to think well, they certainly didn’t deserve that.

120. Explaining to anybody who’s never done it that you’re paid for just three hours
work a day and it’s pathetic really, but what we have to do in those three hours is
extraordinary.

130. That’s quite crucial actually. I have seen that with players, not so much the
opera house but in a symphony orchestra or actually more in a recording studio
where the red light is on and this is costing $1,000 a minute to get this stuff
recorded and you see some players who are obviously very, very worried. With
the right musical conductor, they will maybe spot that, move onto something
else, and let the players just get themselves under control again. It tends to be a
sort of transitory stage. You don’t sort of get one day at 9 o’clock in the
morning that’s it, I can’t play anymore. Maybe you’ve had a bad journey on the
train or had a row or something with somebody a few seconds earlier. It’s a sort
of passing phase of nervousness or inability and just maybe during the coffee
break, a five-minute moment, just checking that particular passage through will
solve any problems. Certainly, say in film sessions and things like that, if you
need that time they will be happy to let you have it, but it takes quite a lot of
confidence to say I don’t think I’m going to play this now, let’s leave it till later.
There’s quite a lot of peer pressure. I should mention that, thinking about it. I
know that nobody in the percussion section wants to appear sort of foolish and
that must work across the orchestra as well. Of course, when you’re sort of
guesting with an outside orchestra, having done this for many years, I know that
there’s a bit more pressure on the freelance than there is on the permanent
member of the orchestra. The permanent member can’t be sacked but a
freelancer can be sent home in an hour’s time.

132. Most definitely. So I think probably the most self critical times I’ve ever been
have been when I’ve been a freelance with an orchestra.

137. I think it’s probably safe to say that you’re probably playing more for your
colleagues than the orchestra. I don’t make that in any sort of showing off way,
but if you play something nicely then it encourages them to play nicely and the
standard of the performance is kept high as a result. You end up with a mutual kind of experience.

144. That’s it. It’s sort of a mutual respect. I know some people—you always wonder how much people hear what you do. The other night it’s a very, very simple solo and it’s eight notes all the same, but I try to make that as musical as possible, and somebody commented on that the other day and said how much they liked it and I found that really rewarding. It’s unlikely somebody in the audience would probably notice that because they’ve come to see the people on the stage.

168. I think always to the extent that one finger was wrong she’d be really, really cross with herself having let that happen. I’d actually seek advice from colleagues after she’d done a solo. Was that all right, would she be happy with that before going back to the dressing room. Not only for my sake but for hers, too. I just want to know what approach to take. That’s how she got to be a principal with that ballet company, in fact. It’s almost like you get daily criticism of the ballet company from the ballet mistress, the director. We don’t tend to experience that in the orchestra.

184. Image, that’s right. I don’t think I answered that. I feel as if it is an image. It’s possibly of my colleagues listening to me. I think it’s safe to say that if I didn’t get something quite right, the most aware I am is of what my colleagues are thinking. Again, it’s an awareness of their criticism as well as mine because I know I’ve got it wrong. I’m also very conscious that they know I’ve got it wrong, too. I think that’s probably an orchestra-wide thing. If it sort of has an image, it’s their hearing me make a mistake. I think the worst thing, of course, is when you don’t know you’ve made a mistake and one comes and tell you.

188. Certainly as a section principal in London, you’d be expected to be able to play just about everything in the regular repertoire. Being a freelance who would like normally play the first chair type of music and then going straight up into the section principal work, yes, the bar was raised then and it was quite amusing because, although I’d been a freelance, then suddenly I had the job at Convent Garden and then expected to be an expert on all opera ballet pieces overnight. People who would never have rung me up to ask me a question previously would suddenly consult me as if I were some sort of oracle. That was quite funny. The most nerve-racking experience I think I had at Convent Garden which made me very aware of just how much I didn’t know was when I first did Tosca, a very well-known opera. We perform it regularly with very little rehearsal and on this occasion, it was my first time doing the part. I think I counted them and there’s something like 26 separate cues for my part. Now the only person who didn’t know where they were coming was the person playing it. Everybody else on the stage and in the pit knew exactly where the they should come. I was very aware of that the first time I did that. You’re joining a roller coaster, or conveyor belt.
is a better expression. You’re joining a conveyer belt that’s been in existence for many, many years. Consequently, you have to sort of double your efforts at the beginning to sort of catch up with the conveyer belt, but once you’re on it you obviously keep your performance standard high. It’s possible to sort of relax your own tension a little bit and actually get down to enjoying the performance, even though it might just be a routine one. I think also not having to worry about what I play on say Swan Lake. I’ve got two Swan Lakes tomorrow. Now I’ve been playing Swan Lake 22 years and I can actually sit back and enjoy the performance because I don’t have to worry. I know I can play all the notes without any trouble at all and I can just make them as musical as I can and I can actually sit back and enjoy it. Not sit back and relax but just almost like being the audience as much as in the pit.

190. That would be earlier this year. Again, I was playing the part. We changed things slightly. We did a particularly good performance and I met some friends afterwards who were enthusing about it. I was really on a high actually. That was a terrific thing. Everything had gone right. We’d had all sorts of problems just prior to that with things not working out quite right, but it had all gone right on that particular evening and I was very proud to have been part of that performance. Every so often you sort of do—we do something that makes me thinks it doesn’t come better than this and I’m always very conscious of it. It’s a bit of a privilege to be sitting there doing it.

194. The principal dancers, they would only do maybe two or three performances a week, possibly even less. The bar for them is very high indeed because whereas we could get many, many goes at Swan Lake, the solo roles in Swan Lakes they would only dance maybe once a month and if it goes wrong, I would imagine the self criticism of that and indeed the official criticism is very great.
I always wanted to dance. I love performing. I get more nervous as I get older. I think as you get older, I think you become a lot more wrong and it feels for me now like it’s the biggest thing that happens. I get a lot more nervous than I used to.

I used to love the dancing part but if any kind of major thing happened, I felt really vulnerable. I used to get absolutely petrified. It’s like a school exam because I didn’t have that security of going home and having your parents around you and that was horrible. I hated it.

It’s very hard for me to say this because it was a very good teacher, but at the same time he did scare me to death. I think very well of him now. To me, he really liked me so I always got a lot of attention, but sometimes he did used to scare me a hell of a lot. These things can’t happen nowadays in schools, but in those days they did.

I’d be doing a step and I just thought I can’t do this and so automatically I went again and I just can’t do it.

I went on stage four nights in a row and fell over and fell flat on my ass four nights. Every time I went on, down I went. I’d get back up and I would go down again. I went down twice in one night regular. Then I was petrified. I used to walk into work and practically vomit on the way to work. That got into a really bad vicious circle.

You dance for the audience, but when you make a mistake and you do something like that, all you think about is the director and the ballet master. Then you start thinking if this keeps on happening, I’m going to lose my job.

It’s slightly embarrassing. To the other dancers the mistake balances in the end with what I did well—they’d try to make a joke of it to make me feel better. It didn’t help inside because I still have to go on the next day and do it again. Towards the end, some of them really tried to help me and they took me aside and said you can do this, but I think a lot of times it’s the negativity in my head that stopped me doing it. It was all mentally. I eventually—I kind of lost the physical feeling too.

It’s a jump that’s like two times around in mid-air. That’s what I lost badly. But then my bad side became really good so I was doing it better to the left than I could do it to my good side. So in some ballets I would change it to the left because I—I lost the feeling of it. It’s like I did it every day. I knew what the feeling was, and suddenly it’s gone. It was like starting to learn to write again. It’s a feeling that is accumulated over—over the years, years of practice and then
suddenly I lost the feeling of how to do it. They sent me off and I had to start again myself and I did eventually get them back. I think also because I became a lot more—I got my confidence back, but I think it was also because eventually I severed a negative relationship. Because I got myself in such a state with the relationship, I eventually said to myself I am not going to be like this ever, ever again.

175. I’m saying that when I was very young within the company because if I’d had that same kind of backing of someone saying yes, you can get on, because my dad used to be the one when I was young doing competitions and I was nine or ten, saying you’re going to win this. And I wanted that from someone when I was 21 in the company to just say look, you’re going to be fine, and have that. I think my career would have been a lot different than what it has progressed.

185. A mistake or it doesn’t feel right, feels like a mountain and you think you’re going to do a pirouette and something’s happened and it’s huge. To me now it feels God is on the floor or something, but somebody else watching might not see because the feeling of it feels differently and I’m really criticizing, and I have to say what was that like because I feel like was it as bad as I felt it was. I try to laugh it off now.

195. When I was 19 or 20, I didn’t realize what was going to be happening with me now, but as you get older, I think you do criticize yourself a lot more than when you were 18 or 19.

209. I think it’s me. I sometimes cry my eyes out because it’s not done properly. I get really mad at myself, and I actually think my head’s going to explode or breakdown. It gets really extreme and I sometimes think my brain is just going to completely dysfunction and then I just kind of think, why am I getting myself worked up like this? Then I try to calm myself down again.

213. Yeah. Like watching in a mirror, looking at yourself every single day to see what you look like.

237. I find myself doing work. I was coming to work and would make myself do it. There were some times on stage I would want to run off and I talked myself through it.

261. I would say more sensitive and at the same time I think I’m a lot stronger now to get myself through a lot of things where if you’d asked me four years ago, I would have not said yes to that sort of thing. But I do still a lot of times have to fight day by day with the negative things coming into my brain of how I see myself on stage.
265. But I'm more probably self-criticizing myself dancing now than when I did four or five years ago.

269. You're too criticizing of what you feel it is. It looks fine. At the same time I think it's not as good as the people around me.

271. I mean, sometimes I know when it's gone really well but when I think something's slightly gone, to me it feels like a huge thing and I have to go then and find someone to find out how bad it looked.

285. And I think a bit of my side was that I trusted some people too much, and I thought they were helping me and they weren't. I don't regret some of it, the negative parts and thinking if I'd adapted better and to been like that, I'd be a lot better dancer, but I also think it's the combination of what happens to your life and different things throughout, not just yourself. It's about how they are with you and it's how you make your life out. You're the one that can make your life to be what it wants to be, but when there's other people in charge of that, you can't necessarily do that.

325. I love performing. I love it and I hate it. I love it, I absolutely love it. It's just certain things. It's that slight negative just before I go on which scares me and I hate that feeling and I wish I could get rid of it and I know I could.

327. There's like a fear that settled in or something. It settled in and it's there all the time. I know I could get rid of it. I know if I went and saw someone I could get rid of it, but I don't really want to.

333. It was a feeling thing that came easy to me, and when somebody took it away it was like having to write again because I lost that feeling of—it was just that one step. I never used to visualize in my head of what it looked like. I just did it and it happened.

345. The worst thing was I would go—although I think it was only this one step, when that negativity sets in, it wasn't just that one—years ago it was just that one step, but I do have negative thoughts all the time when I'm on stage which I shouldn't do. As I said earlier, it's my own fault because I do it to myself. Everyone thinks I'm a really confident person.

347. I always joke. I always look. Even when I did something for Michael, it's stupid—I'm an adult—but I think dancers a lot of times, like when you say when you're young you're treated like a professional but at the same time they treat you as a child. Then a lot of times it doesn't go away. Even when you become an adult, they treat you like children because that's the way you've kind of grown up. For me personally I always look for what somebody's seeing.
381. But that’s where a lot of my negative thoughts came from for me personally. I was trying to explain how I got those and how it set in and it’s kind of stayed there. It’s a fight every day for me. The performance I’m doing now is not strenuous for me, but I’m still thinking of Monday’s performance where it’s something hard for me and it’s a negative thought there.

387. Just me being on stage, I think my parents never thought from the kind of background they were brought up they would have somebody like me at this kind of professional standard. Even though I’m not the best dancer in the company, to get to the Royal Ballet is like at the top of the world. To get what I’ve got now is a huge achievement and I’m proud of that myself.

417. That’s when I know—I think about myself and I go, why am I getting myself worked up about this when I’m here, I’ve made it, and I should just go and enjoy it and I do in a lot of things, but just a lot of times, there’s the build-up for me.
Horizons P3

27. My mother says that I danced before I could walk. I think a lot of mothers say that. I was always—the interesting thing is that I was always going to be a ballet dancer. I was always going to be. That was my decision from an early age.

29. I’m very in the moment.

39. And to be honest, that’s still the case here. We don’t have the choice of well, I could send her to San Francisco or to New York City Ballet School. We don’t really. If you’re going to be a ballet dancer, it’s the Royal Ballet School or nothing. It did have this sort of air. People have written books about getting to the Royal Ballet School. It’s sort of a children’s comic dream.

53. No, absolutely not. Of course, some of our teachers were ex-dancers, and actually I was very fortunate. One of my teachers in the school—my first year was actually with an ex-ballerina as was my second. Although the first was fine, the second was not very positive I must say. The teaching methods were very old fashioned English. Basically you beat people. In my third year, I had a teacher who was really quite young. She must have been—I guess she’d just retired, so late twenties, and very beautiful, very young looking. Still could dance, as opposed to the battle-ax and the old ballerina that I’d previously had. That was a big influence, because the link with my aspirations was very, very clear then through this particular teacher. She was a great influence.

54. In my experience, dancers really are destructively self critical. They have almost to a man, they have extremely low self-esteem, and I do think it roots back to that method of teaching where you’re told that’s dreadful, that’s dreadful, why can’t you do it this way. I think if you’re saying that to young dancers who actually have no sense of themselves as people, they’re pre-adolescents actually, they’re 11, they haven’t formed any beliefs about themselves as people, let alone as dancers, and so to be constantly hammering home that negative message I do think stays with them for a very long time. I also think dancers tend to evaluate themselves against others, which is not very healthy, so it becomes—you think of your world becomes your class and if you’re the best in your class, then you’re good. Actually one of the best pieces of advice I ever got and still carry with me came from that particular teacher who said judge yourself. Judge the progress you make against yourself, not against what the others are doing because you’ll always be ahead of them anyway. It was a very, very wise thing to say and for a 13-year-old quite a complicated concept to take on board. It really did have an effect on me.

57. I’ve had times in my career, in my life, when I’ve had a sense of losing me, but they came later. I think maybe it’s helped that I was sort of different from the others in a sense. I had a certain sort of independent streak and I think what I
perceived as differences and actually may not have been, they became my package, my sense of self. I was pretty able to hang onto it until a quite frightening period when I was injured, much later when I was professional. Then I felt that in losing my dancing self I’d lost myself. I think what I’m saying is that a dancer’s sense of their self is very wrapped up in what they do in their work. I think if you speak to any younger dancers, you will find that how they perceive themselves is almost entirely wrapped up in what they’re doing on the stage.

63. Most dancers I think the self-confidence goes. I think the less you perform, which happens when you get older because more casts are coming through so it’s not only you, but there’s actually two more little girls in the corps de ballet. You can’t actually cope with doing so much. You may get injured a bit more, so you’re performing less and less and less. Your confidence goes and I think for me that’s what will make me go is I don’t want to be scared to go on the stage. I don’t want to wake up dreading a performance because I’ve never had that in my life and I don’t want to finish out that way. I think most dancers, because they’ve lived with their own self-criticism for so long, really from pretty much the beginning of their training, you get used to it. You live with it like you live with a bunion.

65. You do. I think you put it in a box and you try to cover it with compliments and good reviews and created roles and peer support and management support. Then when those things get a bit thin on the ground, the self-criticism rears its ugly head again basically. It comes to the fore once more. I think that’s a sort of cyclical thing throughout one’s career. I notice with myself how crazily I can shift between moods. I can come into work. Maybe I’ve read a review, for instance. I’ve come in and am absolutely, completely happy and then there’s maybe a cast sheet on the board and I’m third cast and not second cast or something, and instantly the mood swings completely.

67. Yes. And the other very interesting thing about reviews which still remains true for me is that basically I am so doubtful of what I’m doing that if there’s 24 good reviews and one bad one, guess which I believe?

69. The good ones I think I fooled them. Oh yeah, I pulled the wool over their eyes basically. The bad one I think they saw through me.

73. The criticism happens while you’re doing it.

77. It can throw your confidence. If it’s particularly bad it can throw you for the next moment, but I think confidence is a bigger picture than that. I think confidence is a sort of—it’s like the saucer that the cup sits on. It’s only eroded—unless you break it, it’s actually eroded over time. It’s like several times in the dishwasher, the gloss will come off and then they’ll be a chip. That’s a little quarter a nick, and then the next quarter of the nick the next day and then
eventually by the end of the week you’ve got a full nick in your self-confidence and then you have several nicks and then you’ve got a hole in your self-confidence. I don’t think it’s quite as instant. One is realistic. It’s like having a conversation now. I’m all the time thinking that was a neat phrase, or I didn’t really put that very well. I’m sure she understood what I meant. You’re evaluating all the time what you do, and I think that’s a normal human process.

79. Yes, I never know if I’m a more conscious—I don’t know, for instance, whether my colleagues operate in the same way or would put it into words. I’m a terrible one for putting things into words because I like to get a handle on them and I think that’s the way you do it is put them into words, but I’m pretty certain that actually that is the process that dancers go through. It’s a subconscious process, too, all the time refining what they do, all the time working on it, so that there’s no—like balance, it’s never static. One’s constantly changing to stay on balance, and I think dancers are constantly searching for the perfection and altering the route to get there.

83. Self-critical. To me, self-critical is quite an intellectual process. I think there’s an intellectual self-criticism and there’s an emotional self-criticism which is actually self-battering.

85. I think I’m probably constantly over self-critical as I think many dancers are. That’s not only about dancing. That would be about life, too. I would go and say I haven’t done enough today on that paper or whatever, and so that’s with me all the time.

87. I think that’s part of the work ethic. Like I shouldn’t brag too much.

93. Yes, I have high expectations of others, but it’s only a high standard of effort. Not of achievement, no. I pretty much judge people on effort and, like my mother, I know that if I want a job done well, I might as well do it myself. Or if I want a job done competently because I don’t think I’ll ever do it really well but I know I’ll do it competently, which is very interesting.

97. I think that seems to me that to be that disappointed, your expectations must have been really high, and I’m not sure I’ve ever been there actually, which is not—I’m really not a slacker or such a bad dancer. I’m just what I call realistic. There have been things which I’ve known I can do extremely well.

101. Yes, certainties of choreography which I know I really can put my mark on. I’m trying to think if I’ve ever come off from a really bad performance. See, I’m not sure I have in most ballets, not one that I would say totally oh my god, sort of send me the news. No, I don’t think so. I’ve had bad experience in other ballets, but then I haven’t expected so much so it’s actually been more an affirmation of my low expectations, which is appalling actually, isn’t it? Actually that is a very
interesting idea. I’ve never really thought of it as downward spiraling aspirations which you reaffirm for yourself every time you go on stage.

103. I think I apply similar rigor to other areas of my life.

105. No, it’s not destructive but then, you have to remember that in the rest of my life, I’m a novice in everything else I do really. I’m a 30-year dancer and a sort of five-year writer and a two-year television presenter and a one-year studio manager, so I’m really new at it. I’m also a novice. I have no training and so actually I’m constantly exceeding my expectations.

117. Self-criticism in its analytical form I think would move—it would take very full steps. It wouldn’t sort of—this is quite a good image, that analytical self-criticism which is probably healthy would be like a surgeon’s scalpel reshaping and perhaps even building up again whereas self-criticism in its negative form is like a saber swipe which takes—it doesn’t only take the soul out but it takes out all the healthy tissue around it.

119. I’ve known dancers whose self-doubt which I guess is related. Has really taken them from being quite literally one of the top dancers in the world to nothing, to retirement. I would imagine for that person the expectations were extraordinarily high.

121. Yes, the inside expectations and, therefore, the drop is that much greater.

123. Seek professional help actually. I’m not being flippant. I think dancers can support each other, but actually I think when you’re that fragile it’s the work of a professional to attempt to put you back on track. I think well meaning—it’s a different area, but in nutrition which I really do know about, the advice that dancers give each other is quite often criminal actually, how they deal with their weight problems or how they get thin for a particular role and so on, and that’s the advice they give. So I’m not sure why they would give better advice on psychological issues than they do on physical issues. Speaking of me, yes, I might try to encourage somebody to see the problem in perspective, to tackle the physical aspects of the problems that they can so that if they’re very critical—for instance, if their pirouettes or their jumps, that one can work on the physical part of that problem.

125. Exactly, work on the technique so that you can perhaps try to address the critical element of that by improving the thing that you’re criticizing, but I think that wouldn’t be complete advice.

129. Sure, that’s true and also you have to remember it’s not a one-off. It’s actually there’s a dynamic built up usually over the course of a year, but in a professional environment that dynamic can be built up over 20 years so that you become
tasked in either a negative or a positive relationship with the teacher which is played out in public. You become the black sheep or the butt of the jokes or the clever one or the one who's too clever by half. Whichever of those roles you're cast over years and it's set in stone and it's in public.

133. Quite right. The problem I have here, as we all do, is that all my little quirks as an 11-year-old are still seen by the people who've known me since I was 11 because you don't stop seeing the cat as a kitten, do you? It's very hard to lose those things. I do think dancing is quite unique in that the humility of going back every day to a teaching situation to becoming, whether you're Dame Margot or dolly ballet girl, you go back to that teaching environment. You put yourself in the hands of the maestro in public. I think it's absolutely unique.

137. I know me more and knowing me better isn't always a good thing because, of course, I can write faults into my core script which maybe aren't actually real or they're exaggerated or they're not important. I've got an idea about them and so they're there, and sometimes another eye coming along and saying well, actually your feet are rather good or I quite like the fact you've got a bit bottom or whatever it is. Someone needs another eye to see that, but one can't rely on always having good teachers around or available and, therefore, each dancer does have a role to play as their own teacher. As dance becomes more and more about individuality, there are fewer absolutes. In classical ballet there are the absolutes. The leg has to be turned out. The foot has to be pointed.

141. Yes, there's always—I think one has things in life which are the things you really want to achieve and within dancing that might be to perform Swan Lake or to be a principal. When you finally get them, of course, now either they're not the mountain they looked like from the foothills or a bit of you suddenly says actually you've only been made a principal because there's a vacancy and they need to fill their budget for the year. You downgrade it. There's definitely a bit of me that will do that.

147. I would get to the most exalted position and I would instantly downgrade it. Yes, definitely. I guess that's healthy. I don't think we should be wandering around thinking oh, I'm on the top of the world and I can do whatever I like. It's probably healthy and I think also that it's keeping things in proportion, that actually one might be a swan queen but there are personal relationships and families and so on which are actually more important.

163. Actually for me going from the school to the company was a bit frustrating because I realized that having been at the very top of the heap I was actually starting at the bottom of a different heap.

165. Yes, and I remember that feeling pretty well. Here's a fresh mountain to climb. It might have been because I had this weird transition into the company. I was
selected to go on tour with the company as a student which is quite prestigious. Then they hemmed and hawed about giving me a job and I didn’t get my contract through and nobody was really saying anything and it was all very kept in the dark, and so it wasn’t a sort of joyous oh, my darling, you’re wonderful, have a job. It was well, yeah okay, well we got a space here. So it wasn’t encouraging me to think I’m continuing on my path to stellardom. It was here’s another heap. I’ve got to climb this one.

195. The choreographer picks their own dancers, but the ballets are done by dead people. It’s done by the artistic director. Basically the dancer’s career is in the hands of the artistic director, especially in a company like this where we do lots of ballets by dead people.

222. Well, the sad thing is I think you only see the peak when you realize you’re going down.

224. Yeah, I think that’s right. I don’t know. I think that somebody like (name omitted), for instance, who is a very big star here, she must know she’s at her peak. She must. She’s been a principal now for several years. She’s dancing every role. She’s in demand all over the world. She must know that’s a kind of peak. My peak never felt like that. It felt like I’d climbed a very, very steep hill, hovered a bit on the top, and then went rattling down the other side. I never felt relaxed enough to enjoy it actually. It’s unfortunate, but I always felt I was not doing as much work as I could and I felt I wasn’t usually sort of first in line for things. I was in a cue and so there wasn’t a feeling of here we go, wow, these are the years.
27. Yeah, it's strange. It was the one thing—it was the one thing that I kept doing and really enjoyed. One of the things that is sort of—after I'd been to ballet classes, one of the things I got into was just literally dancing around at home in the living room. To be honest with you, I still do that today. It's a really funny little ritual for me. That's where I realized that's how I like—what it means to me. It's sort of—it's strange because that's not about—it's about literally losing yourself in movement.

35. It's a very different experience with an audience. I still get that incredible sensation, especially when I first went. I knew it was the same stage, but because of the sets and things, I really felt I was in a different place. I find it quite easy to—not always—but one of the things I can do is immerse myself in it. Again, that comes from the same place.

37. It's almost like really playing. You know that there's an audience there and it's not real and this thing is just painting and cardboard or whatever. In another sense, I don't feel that at all.

57. They sort of take you by osmosis. It's very strange. They never hold auditions. They sort of have you in their consciousness from the beginning, in a way. Then when you get to 16, that's when they start. Now it's different that we don't rehearse. Before the Royal Ballet Upper School and the Royal Ballet Company shared premises in West London. Now we completely rehearse in the Opera House. Before, they would all be seen walking past and there was probably a bit more involvement between the school and the company. They sort of got to know you over those two years, although it could be there a third year. So it was I think through that.

69. Yes, or the school didn't want them there. That was the deal with the school. They literally offered you a year at a time. So each year they would get rid of—they would throw out people they didn't think were good enough to carry on to the next year. So your year just gradually dwindled.

73. Yes. I thought going to a boarding school—I'd come decided that that's what I wanted to do, and my parents quite happily went along with that, and I thought it'd be all midnight feast and bits of dancing. It turned out, unfortunately, to be more like Auschwitz. It was a horror. I found it—some people say they enjoyed it, but I've not met anybody that actually went through it that didn't—that doesn't still have some kind of quirk.

85. Yes. You're immediately—there's this thing that you're at this other school. You're given the impression that you would not make it as a dancer unless through some—you did this sudden test of Hercules or whatever, that some
people would. I’m not defending them, but they would have seen it as trying to be realistic.

87. Well, yeah. I think it was just—I hope to God that it’s psychologically better there today. I don’t think it actually is. So you were instilled with you’re not a big fish in a small pond anymore, that kind of thing.

91. I don’t know. It’s something I felt and then it was something I saw later on. I had a big—the second half of this boarding school experience was very strange. We had a horrible, horrible Russian teacher who kind of still put us in a competitive—and he would be giving us marks for our week’s work and I would usually get zero. Especially when you’re just sort of getting into that teenage, isn’t great. One day, I don’t know what I did. I must have done an exercise. He just went, “I will never look at you again,” and he never did for two more years. So I spent—and we’d have these assessment things and I was always—we were all convinced that we were all going to be chucked out. It’s going to be us, not somebody else. And I always got through them. Another thing that they were very keen to stress was that—because we did normal academic schoolwork as well. They really were trying to stress it and it’s something I always found very, very easy, and so for me actually, one of the things, strangely, at the school that I could really build myself up was the school lessons which I loved. I really, really enjoyed them. So in those two years, I kind of found refuge in all of that, and also because I was considered bright, they kind of kept me on and because I choreographed things.

117. That’s probably my most critical time. I try not to look at it or cover myself up.

119. No, as a student it was much worse. It’s not something now that I worry about. This probably doesn’t help. I’m obviously self-critical, but I try—now I’ve got to the point that unless something goes terribly wrong, it was my fault for not concentrating or really—but those sort of things I can’t change. I’m not going to change now. I don’t know quite how I got from when I was very self-critical and felt that I couldn’t do it. I think feeling that and then having a job, I felt this surely doesn’t compute right.

122. I have the job, so that means that somebody obviously think I must be able to dance.

139. Yeah, I see myself doing it forever really. I’m probably more self-critical about actual choreography than I am about dancing in a way. I’ve just been going on with my memoirs. That is actually where self-criticism for me really comes into play.

141. I’m critical of my own work that I make up.
151. Well, because I couldn’t sit back from it. It’s that feeling of there’s nothing you can do. That’s different than the actual how it’s made. You’re then suddenly trusting the performers to do it justice and you’ve got to let it go. That’s a nerve-racking moment.

159. That’s what I find. I think that’s why I find it much—I find I get much more self-critical about choreography because it is literally coming from you. It’s kind of embarrassing. It’s like pulling you out there. I have a picture in my head and not necessarily the whole picture and I’m trying to work from that or trying to communicate with these people and be in not the power position, but I’m organizing it and leading these people.

165. I keep it in my head and battle it in my head, I think.

173. It depends. It depends how then I judge the piece in its final state. There’s another big thing. When you’re making—it’s very weird. I never feel like I’ve actually seen the whole—because you’re working with it. You’re very close to it and sometimes you just can’t see what the actual bigger picture of it is. And it’s only when I get it the first night in front of the audience, lighting, costumes, everything—I don’t know until then what I’m going to feel about it. It’s only then I can actually go right, this works, or it’s disastrous.

187. Yes, it’s really changed. When I was 11, it was so easy to do it. Just stepping into that imaginary world. There was no self-criticism at all. It just step into it and then take what you want out and then it’s there and great. But then as you get older, getting into that imaginary world because it is like that and getting into that imaginary world gets harder and harder and you start thinking what’s gonna make this piece clever because your brain starts getting involved then. And rather than being instinctive is what happens is you start being more cerebral about it. I also realized for me it doesn’t work if I get cerebral about it and I’ve heard other choreographers say the same thing. (Name omitted) often said it wasn’t until he/she just literally stopped thinking and started doing that he/she started to find his/her work interesting. It’s that stream of consciousness thing.

193. I managed to. So what I’m slowly realizing if I can get to the ideal state of being 11 and going back to my imaginary world willy nilly—it’s not as easy as that, but it gives me more courage and that comes back to your thing about making pieces for yourself because I’m trying to actually make a piece that’s going to interest me and excite me. So the next one I’m doing, I think is really quite a weird piece, but I’m fascinated by watching the dancers do it, and at the moment I’m sort of trying to let that be enough and not to worry about what are going to say, is it going to be a public humiliation. What I said about that first commission and I got the reviews and I saw my name in print and it was terrible, I literally felt every single person on the street would have read that thing. Of course, they wouldn’t.
195. Yeah, and I hid in the cinema and watched the same film twice. That’s something you have to get over. I still would find it difficult. You always say before it, I won’t pay any attention, but I think even now if I read something bad about myself, I would say I don’t like that. But it’s not I’ve done something wrong. I’d say no, it’s probably more human to go well, if you think that’s fine, I don’t think that or butt off or whatever. I realize I’ve got to take that less seriously.

199. I cannot—I have another friend who is actually opposite and likes people involved the whole time. To me because making such a—I’ve got to set up the right situation where I can zip off into fairyland, I keep it very private because it means very much to me. It either falls or flies. Maybe I actually probably put that onto myself a bit.

211. I have to say that having a life is the one thing that gets me through all the works things.

227. Yeah, sort of something hanging over you like chopping you in.

229. It’s something confining.

232. Yeah, I think so. I’d like not to be—I think that’s why I’m less self-critical about my dancing is because more energy probably goes into the choreography work. Yeah, sort of like a dark box around you, quite close to you.

233. I think that it sometimes stops me trying ideas.

235. Yeah. I do think it’s limiting. I don’t see what I would lose about it, to be honest. I don’t think if I had no self-criticism at all, that I would make anything worse. I see it as a very negative thing because self-criticism can be seen as both, good and bad. You’re informing yourself about things. I don’t see it like that. I see it as a very negative thing. Because of all the evaluation, I find that—a lot of people like to analyze and go into it and that’s self-criticism in a way. For me, I find that somehow negative as well.

251. This is one of the things. We’re not athletes. We’re artists. I find with the dancing world that this often gets overlooked, and the only way to make art—art is copying life; that’s what the word means—you need to live your life. You can’t go on stage and you’re watching someone die on stage and people are just—you can’t have that point of reference, but you’ve got to have some kind of human emotions and human reactions and responsibilities in the way things go. That’s some of the things that I think is so important. Whether you make a mess of your life or not, you’ve got to at least try and live it. I find that’s something that’s discouraged somewhat in the dancing profession, in the ballet profession,
because it’s the thing of you’re this nun. You’ve got a vocation and then you devote your life to it.

259. Yes, I can be self-critical in an other way. I can now see it as positive self-criticism that I have. It’s about the decisions I’m making on a larger scale of career which is now where I think you’ve been here for this amount of time. Do you think that you need to do this or do that or say that? That’s probably my good self-criticism.

261. Yes, about come on. You’ve stayed in the same place for too long. One of the things I don’t want to do is get stagnant.
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43. I think for the career that I chose which is classical ballet, certainly dancers look at themselves every single moment that they're at work or training or performing.

45. Well, performing you’re not but you know that you’re being looked at all the time. Most of the time in training you’re looking at yourself as well as being looked at, so everything is critical. You’re critical about yourself, people are critical about you. Criticism is a means of improving always. Obviously, being complimented helps you along the way, but it’s all down to criticism really.

47. Yes. I think what it comes down to, the question I’ve always tried to decide the difference between a sport and an art when it comes to physical art forms is one that I can’t answer absolutely perfectly, but some of the things I’ve thought of it it’s almost like an unachievable state. There is no such thing as a perfect ten like there is in gymnastics or winning the race. It doesn’t matter what the time is. You actually won and you got the gold. You can never actually do that. There’s always further to go, so you could never actually achieve perfection which means that basically you will always be striving more and being criticized saying well, that’s rather wonderful but if you wanted to make it even better, then this is possibly what you could do. So it’s a very critical level from everyone’s point of view. You’re critical about yourself and everyone else is critical about you, and that’s what makes it work. That’s how you improve.

51. Yes, because again, there’s just so many more rungs to look at. You don’t just have one single fixed rung. It sort of branches of into so many different directions. There’s so much more depth that you can achieve because it’s not just a physical form. It’s the emotional and the dramatic side of everything. Again, you can be technically near perfect with the most blessed physical attributes in the world, but be lacking in other aspects in perhaps dramatic or whatever. There’s much more scope for improvement. I suppose criticism, I always feel that there’s this negative side, but it’s not. Criticism is just giving an opinion, I suppose on what’s being seen or done. Yes, that’s how it goes. There are criticisms happening on all levels, on many more levels than just a physical level. There are emotional and dramatic levels as well. Even at age maybe 60, if you’ve been a professional dancer for 45 years of your life, then there are still things that you can learn or still opinions that you can take on board. You can be criticized at that age. I think it is sort of the basis of improvement and it never stops.

55. Unless you are sitting up front in the orchestra playing, leading the orchestra, then you could sort of just do what was necessary. I suppose you can do that to a degree in dance if you wanted to, but then everybody aspires to just getting a little bit further and you can do that in dance in a way that you can’t so easily in the back of the orchestra because there are so many tiny little rungs of the ladder...
on the way to the big steps up the ladder that you can improve yourself upon. Yes, it’s very, very unlikely that someone does the bare minimum and bides their time because that’s not what it’s about really. I don’t think anyone does that.

61. That decision, I think, was probably made for me actually because at that stage, at age 15-1/2 when I was decided, when I had decided that ballet was what I wanted to do, I then got into the Royal Ballet School which was the best school to be going to in the country or one of the top in the world. There was no question about it. I got in and I’m going sort of thing. That’s that. It was very tough for me to just leave home.

63. I did actually again, because it started so young the whole training and semi-professional performing. I’d also been doing summer schools more or less every year for three or four weeks of full-time training and actually by the age of 14 realized that I actually had it in me to do it because obviously dancing two or three hours every other night or maybe four or five times a week after school is a completely different ball game. It’s an unknown. If you starting looking forward and thinking I’m going to be dancing six hours a day every day six days a week and living away from home, I didn’t actually know if I had it in me or if I’d still enjoy it. Visiting these summer schools three or four weeks and doing that, dancing all day every day and being away from home, I actually did realize that I got a lot of out it and the improvement level was vast compared to what I was getting. Going from two hours a day to six hours a day was exhausting but you make leaps and bounds of improvement. I enjoyed it. I realized that I could do it and I wasn’t actually too concerned about that, about the fact of whether I’d want to get up or not because I know that that’s what I wanted to do by then.

67. It’s also a little bit frightening as well because some people live in that world and that is their world literally. There is no other world. I think at the moment at the Royal Ballet Company, there are quite a few people who have families and lives outside, but the last generation of dancers. They gave it their life and their world and their everything to dance, and they have nothing and no one else. I think it’s changed for the moment. Who knows, it might change back again. It is a bit worrying because you can get quite enclosed.

117. It is still fun, but it’s a lot harder. I think that’s what it comes down to. When you’re younger, I think certainly nine years old, you are of a standard or of a level that’s either right or a bit above what an average nine-year-old boy dancer can do. You never have to think too much about technical this, that, or the other, or making sure that it’s all exactly how the choreography is set because there isn’t really any choreography. You kind of do whatever it is that you’re doing at the time which isn’t particularly enshrined with any notation or anything. It’s just some little jig that someone’s put together and you can do it to the best of your ability and most people think it’s great and you’ll have a fantastic time doing it. There’s a lot more responsibility, I suppose, at the professional level.
because you’re not only satisfying the needs of the audience and giving them the best possible performance that you give, but there’s also the choreography which is incredibly important in the company’s history and heritage.

129. No. In exactly the same way, a dancer could go on stage and do a full three-act ballet and be absolutely fantastic in everything but one step, and they’ll remember that one step and it will plague them afterwards and they’ll think—it will be exactly the same as playing a bum note in the orchestra for the musician. It’s very perfectionist approach. If you meet a friend who was watching or your family afterwards, they’ll have loved it, but you’ll say I made a mistake, and they’ll say, I didn’t notice that, what are you talking about? Yeah, don’t you remember that bit when I went slightly the other way to the other person who was doing the same steps? They say, no I didn’t notice that. That’s what the dancer remembers, but often the audience wouldn’t even notice.

131. I personally just put it down to experience and try and learn from it. I think my own personal—I would suffer more from it if a mistake affected anyone else on the stage who was performing. I find that a lot more upsetting or more difficult to deal with because if you made a mistake yourself and you’re up there and you look bad or if you feel you’ve done something bad, that’s one thing, but if you’ve made someone else look not fantastic or you put them off something that they’re doing very well, then I find that quite hard to deal with, to come to terms with, because it was your fault and they suffered for it. Day to day little bits and bobs, I don’t worry about that. No one is a robot and no one is perfect. Everyone makes mistakes.

135. Yeah, even rehearsing because there’s the cliché that every day is a performance or whatever. You are literally under the microscope. All the time every single time that you’re in there, the artistic managers are watching you. It could be your big golden opportunity to be spotted or noticed and get on in something that you really want to do.

139. Absolutely. I remember being in a position where I was very nervous and young in the company and it was completely having detrimental effects on me. I was just doing things wrong all the time and forgetting what the steps were and doing them terribly because I knew that I was being watched. I think I had a bit of a fallout with one of the managers. He was picking on me a bit and it really did have a huge effect because I knew for a fact that he was watching me all the time and he was waiting for me to go wrong basically, and I did. I went wrong every single time because I knew that he was looking for me to go wrong, so I went wrong. I took quite a while. I took about a year or so to go beyond that and just think clearly and focus on what I was doing rather than worry about who was looking at me.
145. No, unless you join the company sort of higher up the ranks, everyone is the same really. They have their golden eggs waiting they believe will hatch and become huge big stars and a lot of them do.

147. Basically most dancers who join the Royal Ballet Company, a top professional ballet company, are all very, very good and are all potentially fantastic, but you never know until you start performing, which you don’t know until you join the professional company what you’re going to be like as a performer or how you’re going to fare or what it’s going to be like.

159. It is a critical thing. It just kind of goes a bit deeper, I suppose, because again, I think it’s a progression from more technical stuff to a kind of wider field, that sort of combines the technique and dramatic stuff and the whole picture rather than just whether or not you were doing the steps as good as everyone else that you’re dancing with.

161. The thing is, the technical thing catches your attention much, much more obviously because there is a right and a wrong. If you fall over or if you draw the wrong leg, then it’s wrong. In the dramatic side of the art, an interpretation can be different and it can be something that you personally like or you personally don’t, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s wrong. I would say—yes, I suppose you would be more critical of a dramatic side of the job because there’s more to be critical about because there are more interpretations of it.

165. Because there is a standard, I would be far more embarrassed and self critical of myself than if I went up there and somebody wasn’t very convinced of my particular interpretation of a role because I just didn’t do it for them. That was my interpretation and I wouldn’t be—I would be able to argue about that I believe that I was doing what I was doing. But if I did something wrong, then I would be very self critical of myself.

171. In some ways, I sort of think of confidence which is the opposite, I suppose, the way you are feeling if you are feeling self critical. What it comes down to is I believe how confident you were about yourself in what you’ve been doing. Because in some ways, being self critical, you could also be complimenting yourself. Do you know what I mean? In a sort of negative aspect.

175. If you think about—I suppose it’d be a bit like sarcasm. Gosh, I was rubbish at that when you know that actually you’re really very good, but you’re criticizing yourself because you’re not as good as you think you should have been. In fact, to an onlooker you’re really rather fine.

177. Yes, but it’s not a very nice way to do it. It’s not a very nice picture now that I’m seeing. It’s like an ogre. I suddenly got a picture.
179. An ogre—self criticism. Again, the confidence thing does work in the way that
you would normally think of it, but being self critical, that you’re not happy with
what you’ve done and you really don’t believe— you really are unhappy with
what you’ve done. Even when people actually are happy with the way things are
going or with what you’ve done and you’re not, that’s really not very nice
because that’s sort of a slippery slope.

187. It’s really not what I want to hear and I don’t take the compliment at all. It has a
negative affect to me at that moment. In thinking back now, it’s very positive
and in retrospect I kind of think back on it, it makes sense, but then it really at
times is very hard. It’s almost like a negative feeling. It makes my confidence
even worse.

191. Yes. It just dawned on me just then what it is about that. The whole learning
process as a dancer through criticism is always through reasoning. You reason
what you’re being criticized about, the aspects of what you’re doing. If you did
a performance of something which was quite a complex role and somebody of
relevance, maybe an artistic member of staff, came back and said it was good or
fantastic, well done, then it would be nice. But then you sort of think well why
was it good? There’s a lot more to it than just good. I want to know what was
good about it. I want to know what was bad about it. That’s what the learning
process is, that good isn’t good, you want to know why or what’s bad. You
want to know more than just good. You want to know it could have been like
this or that was quite different or this was individual or that was terrible or
whatever.

197. Yeah. I think there is some relevance, but there are certain aspects of just being
involved in a fantastic production as well sometimes, that you know that you’re
on stage and a part of a really exciting piece of theatre and the audience
absolutely loves it and you think well, I was involved in that and that’s great. It
doesn’t happen often, but it does happen.
39. Really mixed. I'm very, very happy that I went there. There were some great aspects to it and some not-so-great aspects. I think the great things were being in London, the experience of leaving home, the people that I met, some of the teachers, the choreographic teachers were wonderful, some of the academic teachers. Somehow I managed to get quite a few supporters that weren't strict ballet stuff. My ballet teachers were not so supportive and if they weren't exactly destructive, they weren't far off. They obviously helped in terms of my ballet training because I'm sure I improved those two years, but I think I lost a lot of confidence.

49. Possibly a bit. I think once you've got the job, you haven't got—when I was eight or nine I didn't have this, but certainly at the Royal Ballet School you had someone telling you that you were bad pretty much every day. Then when you're in a professional company, you don't have that which obviously is quite nice.

75. I think I've probably always have had a certain security. I think I am able to see the whole thing in a reasonable perspective, partly because of my background with my parents, being brought up in a normal environment until I was 16. It wasn't that I'd spent my whole life dancing and that's the whole point of it. It is a big point of it now, but that's through my own choice. I think I'm probably quite mature for my age, which sounds silly to say, but I think it's probably true. I've always had older friends and I'm quite calm and relaxed and not—I don't stress about things or I'll stress about things in a good way when I have to get things done. It gives me adrenaline to do it, but not negative stress. I don't think I'm really self critical. I can forgive myself things. There's no point in getting upset because you can't do something. You just have to do it or change it or whatever.

79. Yeah, you have to assess moods, mood changes, and lots of things like that very quickly, especially a lot of the work that I've done has been very fast. With the Royal Ballet Company, they never give you enough time to do anything. The dancers work very hard. They're very good, but they are very self critical, and I think that probably has the opposite effect on me that I end up calming everyone down and trying to salvage what could be a very stressful situation into one that just does the job.

82. Not slower because that's the thing. You have to get through it, but you just have to try and smooth it down and go rather than just—there's no point in trying to scream and yell and get stressed. You have to take the personalities that you've got, make them calm, make them confident, and then do the job. You have to think that a lot more to be very sensitive to what's going on in the
room much more than when you’re a dancer and you sort of just go, you just do what you’re told really.

89. I’m usually less critical while I’m in making the piece. Obviously, I’m trying to look at it objectively, work out what I like and what I don’t like, what works or doesn’t work, but I wouldn’t say it’s being—it is being critical, but it’s sort of working on the piece, just playing with it. Usually by the first performance, I’m happy with it, but that’s also sort of feeling of I’m done, thank God for that, it’s on. It’s there. Usually I get much more critical about six months to a year after it and I look back at the video and I’m like oh, my God. Sometimes I look back and think yes, I’m proud of that.

95. Yeah. There’s some things I look at and I say—there’s a couple of things I look at and say now I really like that and usually it’s the things that really come from my gut, very emotional output rather than crafted stuff or things I was trying to do good choreography. The things I like afterwards tend to be the things that I had to make and didn’t really question and just put out there.

136. Yes, and they’re very—the dancers that I’ve worked with are generally very intelligent and they are the sort of performers that you can trust to give a good performance, to use their own integrity and so on in their performance. But it’s trusting that is the hard time. It’s giving up the control because as the choreographer, you are the one in control until the first performance.

140 That I love it, that I can’t—there are so many times. It’s my job and it’s my passion, and both of those count. I’m always listening to music. I’m always thinking of new choreographic ideas. When I go and see a performance, it either inspires me or it bores the hell out of me and then I’m just looking at that black box, thinking what I could do in the space. It’s just always on my mind, even when it’s not on my mind in terms of dance. Say I’m in a part with a friend, I’ll be choreographing somehow. The way I interact with someone is a choreography.

156. I think the thing is I’ve never—the opportunities have come and I’ve never thought about it too much. If someone would ask me to choreograph something, I’d say yes and I’d do it, rather than thinking about the responsibility of it or the hugeness of it or should it be this or should it be that. Often I just try to let them come out. They come out very easily and then I’ll play, rather than thinking how should I start this or that or should I really be here at all. I don’t think about it too much.

170. Yeah, they do, but I think a lot of them have been there for seven years and because they’ve gotten through this seven years, the criticism from the teachers doesn’t hit them probably quite as hard. They see through it and they just presume that’s sort of part of the course. Whereas for me, it did throw me
actually, the criticism. Also I didn’t really want to be in the Royal Ballet Company and just do Swan Lake. I always wanted to do other things anyway and go abroad and travel and be in another country. It wasn’t that I—I would have gone to the Royal Ballet because it was a job and a very good one, but I don’t think it was ever the one and only thing I wanted to do.

176. It really depends on the personality. There are some people that I’ve seen, people that I know, who have gone through the whole Royal Ballet School who didn’t get in or didn’t become professional dancers and have gone off to Cambridge University or Oxford University and have become top professional people, lawyers, doctors, whatever. I think if you’ve got the right mental attitude, the dancing gives you a huge self discipline which can be applied in any subject really. If you play it right, it gives you sort of confidence in yourself, that you can take a lot. If you can get through all the mental abuse that they throw at you in a school like that and come out the right way, even if you’re not a dancer, you’re going to get through pretty much everything else. If you don’t, I think you can end up quite a mess for a few years.

188. It’s true. I do that. The last choreography I made had all good reviews apart from one, and that was the focused one. It’s true. I think you have to think it through and then you can give it value or not. It’s true, that’s strange. I wouldn’t say I was obsessed by it, but it’s true that I do focus on the bad ones.

190. One thing that I don’t know came to mind now is with dance I think it’s the art form that you have actually nothing at the end of the day. If you made a painting, if you have a piece of music, you’ve got it. It’s there. You’ve either got it written down or you’ve got the CD or something. But with dance, you’ve got a video but it’s actually never the same, unless you make a film which I think is very rewarding. There’s this awful feeling after you’ve finished a run of performances that you’ve really worked on or you’ve finished a choreography and the last performance has happened. It’s a huge empty feeling. You’re like what was that, and it just feels so very empty, like a vacuum. I think something about the critics, they always come out after the event and you’ve had the whole excitement and the adrenaline and it’s almost like—that might just be me because generally I’ve had pretty good critics, and at the time I’ve always been quite happy with what I’ve done, so you’ve had the positive things. Then if you do get a negative, especially if it’s only one negative thing, you look at it and you’re like oh, and it sort of echoes around in that vacuum.

192. Exactly, and you do have to devalue it. You have to look at it and say okay, she’s saying that, she’s saying that. I agree with that, it’s a good point. I don’t agree with that, she doesn’t know what she’s talking about. You do have to consider it.
200. No. I think I probably carry—the one I just got one I'll probably remember for quite a while. When you read it, it goes so straight inside you. Actually, I think she was just referring to a certain bit and yes, it is the choreography that she thinks is bad, but it was just the way she phrased it that I thought was particularly mean. Yes, I'll probably remember that one.

202. That's okay. I don't take it seriously. It doesn't affect me, but I'll remember it just because of the phrasing of it.

212. My initial response was it hurt. It took my breath away. It was quite nasty. It was a bit like gutting. For about five seconds, I was like ow.

214. Yeah, that's funny because actually it relates back to what you were saying before. When I was at Upper School, they had a parents day once. I can't remember which year I was in. My parents came and the parents went around and spoke to all the teachers basically. They went first to all the academic staff who all raved about me, that I was questioning, thought for myself, and so on. Then they went to the ballet staff who said how awful it was that I was so questioning and didn't listen and they could see in their head that I was questioning all the time. And my parents were absolutely shocked, being teachers. Of course, I should be questioning and asking about things. I think it is absolutely natural with me and yes, I tried very hard to disguise it when I was at school because I knew it wasn't the acceptable thing.
Appendix E

Invariant Constituents
Invariant Constituents P1

Self-criticism is insecurity.
Self-criticism is losing your nerve.
Self-criticism is losing confidence.
Self-criticism is preemptive — notice a mistake before someone else does.
Self-criticism is being wrong.
Self-criticism is fear of being found out.
Self-criticism is self-perpetuating: know not right — become critical — worry about it
Self-criticism is vulnerability to other’s evaluations.

Invariant Constituents P2

Self-criticism is losing confidence.
Self-criticism is self-perpetuating: mistake — loss of confidence — fear — mistake.
Self-criticism is a barrier to being a better performer.
Self-criticism is experienced alone, hidden from outside view.
Self-criticism exaggerates mistakes.
Self-criticism makes one vulnerable to the criticism of others.
Self-criticism breeds dependency on others’ evaluations of one’s self.
Self-criticism is self-generating.
Proportional self-criticism enhances performance.
Self-criticism is limiting.
Self-criticism is enduring.
Self-criticism is controlling.
Self-criticism is a fear settling in.
Self-criticism is constant.
Self-criticism is an inner dialogue.

Invariant Constituents P3

Self-criticism is related to expectations as ‘expert’.
Self-criticism is constant.
Self-criticism is fear of being ‘found out’.
Self-criticism is cyclical.
Self-criticism aids refinement.
Self-criticism is something you live with and get used to.
Self-criticism is enduring.
Self-criticism can be like a surgeon’s scalpel or a saber swipe.
Self-criticism downgrades.
Self-criticism keeps things (view of self) in proportion.
Self-criticism contributes to a fear of going on stage.
Invariant Constituents P3 (continued)

Self-criticism can be covered.
Self-criticism is part of a work ethic.
Self-criticism erodes confidence.
Self-criticism is not static.
Emotional self-criticism is self-battering.
Self-criticism creates self-doubt.

Invariant Constituents P4

Self-criticism is a loss of confidence.
Self-criticism is related to fear of embarrassment and humiliation.
Self-criticism is mediated by the opinions of others.
Self-criticism is experienced as an internal dialogue.
Self-criticism is experienced alone, hidden from outside view.
Self-criticism is confining.
Self-criticism is self-generated.
Self-critical thinking is dichotomous. (all or nothing)
Self-criticism hangs over you.
Self-criticism is related to return on investment – more energy in, more critical.
Self-criticism is dark.
Self-criticism is unnecessary.
Self-criticism challenges stagnation.
Self-criticism is cerebral, not instinctual.
Self-criticism exaggerates mistakes.

Invariant Constituents P5

Self-confident is the opposite of self-critical.
Self-criticism is a fear of embarrassment.
Self-criticism is the basis of improvement.
Self-criticism is constant.
Self-criticism is exaggerating mistakes.
Self-criticism is being wrong.
Patronizing comments deepen the self-critical experience.
Self-criticism is a way to communicate your expertise to others.
Self-criticism is like a slippery slope, unstoppable.
Invariant Constituents P6

Self-criticism is losing confidence.
Self-criticism is constant.
Self-criticism exaggerates mistakes.
Self-criticism is being afraid.
Self-criticism is not calm – stirs things up.
Self-criticism can throw you and hits hard.
Self-criticism is hidden.
Clusters and Themes P1

Self-criticism

Experienced as:

- Being insecure
- Losing your nerve
- Losing confidence
- Being wrong
- Being afraid

Purpose:

- Preemptive

Structure:

- Self-perpetuating

Effect:

- Vulnerability

He describes himself as:
Knows where he’s going, musician first - then a soldier, careful, lucky, privileged, self-disciplined, aware of his technical ability (strengths and weaknesses), has a veneer of security, but believes he will be found out, brisk with other people at times, doesn’t like to stir things up.

Themes:

- Precision and Courage
Clusters and Themes P2

Self-criticism

Experienced as:
- Losing confidence
- Being afraid
- Being alone
- Being helpless

Experience is:
- Hidden
- Inner/inside

Purpose:
- Control
- Limit

Structure:
- Self-generating
- Self-perpetuating
- Dynamic
- Constant
- Enduring

Effect:
- Vulnerability
- Dependency
- Barrier
- Exaggerate mistakes

He describes himself as:
Emotional, insecure, very goody-two-shoes, emotionally stronger than he used to be, looking for support from other people, certain in things, being able to get back up after falling, proud, trusting some people too much, mixed-up, someone everyone sees as confident, knowing his abilities and knowing how far they will go, not super-intelligent, logical,

Theme:

Lost and Longing
Clusters and Themes P3

Self-criticism

Experienced as:
   Being afraid
   Self-doubt
   Assault

Experience is:
   Hidden

Purpose:
   Keep proportion

Structure:
   Constant
   Cyclical
   Enduring
   Dynamic

Effect:
   Refinement
   Downgrade
   Erode

She describes herself as:
Focused, in the moment, survivor, adapter, different from the others, having an
independent streak, having an extraordinary physicality and a real physical joy in her
dance, getting a handle on things by putting them into words, judging other people on
effort, when wanting something done well - needing to do it herself, not a slacker,
realistic, knowing the things she does extremely well.

Themes:

Clarify and Cut
Clusters and Themes P4

Self-criticism

Experienced as:

- Losing confidence
- Being afraid
- Dark
- Being alone
- Hanging over you

Experience is:

- Related to amount of energy invested
- Hidden
- Mediated by others

Purpose:

- Unnecessary

Structure:

- Self-generated
- Dichotomous
- Cerebral, not instinctive

Effect:

- Confining
- Challenge stagnation
- Exaggerate mistakes

He describes himself as:
Quite a strange child, bright, a good boy who is hard working, a terribly pretentious teenager, very good at looking after himself, private, confused, under confident, lucky, when he gets into situations he tends to face them, but he waits until it gets as bad as it could get, doing the work of seven people, forcing himself to try as many experiences as possible.

Theme:

Restraint
Clusters and Themes P5

Self-criticism

Experienced as:

- Losing confidence
- Being afraid
- Being wrong

Experience is:

- Deepened by patronizing comments

Purpose:

- As a base
- Way to communicate expertise to others

Structure:

- Constant
- Unstoppable

Effect:

- Improvement
- Exaggerate mistakes

He describes himself as:
Clear and focused, doesn’t want to rock the boat, open-minded, doesn’t put all his eggs in one basket until he has to, tends to kind of get on with people.

Themes:

- Unchanging and Unbiased
Clusters and Themes P6

Self-criticism

Experienced as:

Losing confidence
Being afraid
Being thrown and hit

Experience is:

Hidden

Purpose:
N/A

Structure:

Constant

Effect:

Exaggerate mistakes

She describes herself as:
Always having a certain security, able to see the whole, reasonable, calm, young, mature for her age,

Theme:

Balance
Appendix G

Structural Description Summaries
Structural Description: P1
Self-criticism is making a mistake (or knowing what you have done is not right), then you become self-critical and worry about making the same mistake. The important part is knowing what is right and wrong because the worst thing that could happen is not knowing you’ve made a mistake and someone else does.

Structural Description: P2
Self-criticism is something PM does to himself. It is an inner dialogue that begins with “it’s my fault” and ends with him asking himself, “why am I getting myself worked up like this?” (paragraph 209). Self-criticism is ‘there all the time” (paragraph 327) and “doesn’t go away” (paragraph 347).

Structural Description: P3
Self-criticism is cyclical throughout one’s career. “I think you put it in a box and you try to cover it with compliments and good reviews and created roles and peer support and management support. Then when those things get a bit thin on the ground, the self-criticism rears its ugly head again basically. It comes to the fore once more” (paragraph 65). Self-criticism is not only about dancing, but also about other aspects of one’s life. For example saying “I haven’t done enough today on that paper” (paragraph 85). Self-criticism is with you all the time.

Structural Description: P4
Self-criticism is something one “puts onto one’s self” and is about “either falling or flying” (paragraph 199). Self-criticism is about thinking, not about doing. Self-criticism gets in the way of instincts. The juxtaposition of feeling like “I can’t do this” with having a job with the Royal Ballet lessens self-criticism or that “this surely doesn’t compute” (paragraph 119).

Structural Description: P5
Self-criticism is the basis for improvement, a process through which one learns their craft. It is also a way to communicate one’s expertise to others. For example, it is responding to someone who has complemented your performance by saying “Gosh, I was rubbish at that when you know that actually you’re really very good, but you’re criticizing yourself because you’re not as good as you think you should have been. In fact, to an onlooker you’re really rather fine” (paragraph 175). Self-criticism is about wanting to know more, “what was good about my performance, what was bad, why was it good or bad?” (paragraph 191). Self-criticism happens all of the time and never ends.

Structural Description: P6
Self-criticism is constant, “there is more of an ongoing fight” (paragraph 47) and hidden, “they [the dancers] didn’t know that about me” (paragraph 83).
BIBLIOGRAPHY


