

THE EFFECTS OF HATHA YOGA ON CONTEMPORARY DANCE: PITFALLS,
PRACTICES, AND POSSIBILITIES:

By
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*To all of my teachers who have sparked my curiosity and imagination, and have nurtured
and guided me throughout all the twists and turns of my journey:*

*Your patience, expertise, enthusiasm and personal dedication have lit the way for my
dancing career as well as my personal life, and, in turn, shone a guiding light on my
newer path of sharing this through the education of others. It is an honor to be a part of
the great lineage of dancers who have passed the torch of knowledge through time by
endless hours of physical and intellectual study in order to magnify the magnificent light
of the soul for all to see from either the stage or street.*

For Mark and Ella, my parents, and my mentor, Judith Hanson Lasater

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My final project for the Graduate and Liberal Studies Program at Wesleyan University is a culmination of my six – year pursuit of a Masters of Arts and Liberal Studies with an emphasis in Movement Studies. I designed a study that enabled me to utilize a multitude of skills learned throughout the following courses during my graduate experience: *Laban Movement Analysis, Yoga, Meditation, Anatomy, Choreographic Improvisation*, and my independent study on *Awareness, Understanding, and Connection through Multi-Sensory Learning* to name a few. The focus of my final project was to discover and explore the effects and benefits of Hatha yoga practice to the committed dancer, through extensive research and interviews.

Under the expert guidance of George Russell, D.C., I initiated an in-depth study that sought to discern the impact of yoga on the dance field by setting up a series of interviews with a number of fellow dancers, colleagues, and artists who have experienced benefits or injuries that have been either assuaged or aggravated by a yoga practice. I have drawn upon their experiences as well as my own dance training, performing, and teaching career, and have gathered data that has enabled me to look for trends in this unique population. Throughout this project, I have been examining data in order to draw a variety of opinion – based conclusions as a result of my findings as to how a yoga practice has impacted the careers and lives of this representative sampling of forty-one dance performers.

Kinesiology, dance, and yoga constitute the knowledge base from which I developed this project. In addition, I have received generous assistance from experts in all these fields, notably George Russell, D.C., Peentz Dubble, Dr. Terry Pettijohn, and Judith Hanson Lasater, PH.D, P.T. Their guidance, support, and experience have enabled me to formulate articulate conclusions from an overwhelmingly large and fascinating trove of data. This data has focused on success, injury, and challenge, as well as profound impacts of my own and other's yoga experience. My mentors have helped me organize this information thematically by assessing body type, attitude, movement patterns, and injuries in relation to training, body balance and structural efficiency, including preference, forms of rehabilitation, and genetic and cultural factors. A wonderful by-product of my research and analysis is that I am able to make more fluent and accurate observations and assessments in the classroom, and I expect that this will only continue as I continue to teach and write.

I was fortunate to know and be referred to many dancers who were willing to share their extraordinary journey, more, in fact, than was practical to manage, and which influenced my decision to present conclusions in a manner more representational than statistical. (The nature and content of my interview process informed the nature of my methodology; my reasoning will be revealed below.) The interview stage of this project took a total of six months and involved forty-one interviews. (See the appendix at the end of this paper for a complete list of those interviewed, as well as their location within the country, the majority being from the northeastern portion of the United States). I laid the groundwork for at least fifty more, but chose to stop for the time being at forty-one,

because the material was so abundant that to proceed to the analysis phase became more of an immediate exigency.

It also became necessary to make choices as to which portions and persons to include from the actual interviews in order to narrow the scope of the project, which revealed a far greater complexity at closer examination. The result has been a smaller focus than I had originally intended. I discovered that this topic has been woefully under-researched and I am more aware of the enormous amount of research that can and should be done to improve the research in the worlds of yoga and dance. My overall focus is therefore on the experiential aspects of my research, and I leave the quantification of these phenomenon for someone with greater resources than myself. My intention is for this project to act as a springboard for others and myself, to focus in different directions in future writings and publications.

It was a pleasure speaking with so many dancer/yogis who shared a passion for my fields of inquiry. Like myself, most preferred to meet in person, and whenever this was possible I would arrange to meet with the participants in their own terrain. The whole summer ended up being one adventure after another, with trips to places scattered across the country such as Minneapolis, MN, Sioux Falls, SD, San Diego, CA, Washington, CT, Erie, PA, and New York City. The trip to New York was by far the busiest, with an itinerary that allowed me enough time to travel from one interview to the next, often from eight in the morning until midnight, with room for an occasional yoga class or dance concert in order to witness one of my interviewees and experience some of the many yoga teachers and styles discussed. Because of the overall level of enthusiasm of the participants, I invariably utilized every moment scheduled, often using the extra

time that I had padded between the interviews in order to accommodate for zealous conversations as well as spontaneous additional interviews. With emails and telephone I continued to connect with friends and colleagues across the world including a former Juilliard graduate who has since relocated to Bali, who graciously connected me with others within the field of inquiry. The number of individuals who were willing to meet with a perfect stranger for several hours was astounding, and I believe reflected the dedication for either their own field or the person who had recommended them to me for my research (including George Russell, D.C., and Irene Dowd, who generously facilitated contacts with their acquaintances for research, many of whom are famous and influential within the dance world). Equally astounding was the sense of warmth and family that I experienced throughout my endeavors as I embarked on exploring the interface of yoga and dance.

In order to minimize the bias of preconceived notions in the interview process, I widened my scope to include a simple open-ended premise, that yoga had an impact on the dance world, and I brought with this a curiosity as to the ways in which this may have manifested for others. Additionally, I presumed commonalities of experience, which could be culled and integrated with accuracy and conscious intent. Alongside this very open ended intention to uncover whatever truths could be gleaned, I brought with me an open mind and willingness to deeply listen, a recording device and notebook, and a list of several questions that would provide the basis for my inquiries:

1. What was your introduction to dance?
2. At what age did you begin?
3. What attracted you to dance?
4. What have been your main technical limitations and injuries in dance?
5. How, and at what point in your career did you discover yoga?
6. What form of yoga do you study and/or teach?

7. What benefits have you gained from yoga study?
8. Does your body ask you to do certain poses? Do you have favorite poses?
9. What difficulties have you had in your yoga practice?
10. Are there poses that you avoid?
11. Do you relate any of these difficulties to your status as a dancer?
12. Do you take a different approach to yoga technique as opposed to your dance technique, and if so, what?
13. Have you been injured doing yoga, and if so, how?
14. Is there any way in which the study or practice of yoga has impeded your dance technique or creative work?

Admittedly, I came to work on this research with certain biases that have to do with my own experiences as a dancer, choreographer, and teacher. Part of the interest of this project was to find out if other people had experiences like my own. I developed the questions based on my assumptions, interests, and experiences: but the open-ended questions that I asked and the responses that ensued led me to a field of inquiry larger and different than I had originally anticipated. The passionate responses of the interviewees and the startling unity of certain themes, some of which reflected my own experience and some of which did not, form the main content of this paper. I wanted to know how these dancers approached yoga and how and whether the practice of yoga had affected their wellbeing in a positive or detrimental manner. Injury occurrence and prevention in dancers and the relationship between injury and yoga were of particular interest to me not only because this is a major area of interest for me as a dancer, teacher, and scholar, but also due to the fact that this topic was mentioned so often by the dancers that I interviewed. Many, if not all, of these dancers cited injury prevention as reasons for seeking and incorporating yoga as a practice.

For the sake of objectivity I chose to use the colloquial language of the interviews, rather than to transform grammatical prose into scholarly prose. I deemed this to be the most accurate way for the voices of the interviewees to be heard without

distorting the data. I continue to feel a tremendous responsibility to the interviewees as well as the dance community that they represent, since this research has placed me in a position to give voice to a representational sampling of the dance community. The importance of accuracy and compassion cannot be underestimated, as the system of pedagogy and mentoring is deeply affected by the role that teaching and writing plays in the lives of dancers. Dance is communicated by an oral and kinesthetic communication, both of which are difficult to translate into writing. This situation makes it difficult to learn from the positive and negative experience of others, unless one is in direct contact. Therefore, the purpose of my paper is to impart this information in a way that it can be used more broadly, due to the fact that pedagogy and practice in dance and yoga are constantly evolving and often problematic. The methodology that I employed was to cull the concerns and experiences of dancers who study yoga and to present them in a way that will improve the lives of dancers and the work of teachers and choreographers. These intentions underlay the judgments I made about what material to include or not include from my data.

My methodology is also informed by the ethical principles of yoga as laid out in the yoga sutras, most notably the yamas and niyamas.¹ I sought to correlate and evaluate practices and behaviors in the dance and yoga world, as well as the experiences of dancers in yoga, by utilizing these principles. I gathered information systematically, sifting through the trove of data as well as my instinctive feelings – both the psychological and kinesthetic means of which I was privileged in both the writing as well

¹ These are ethical guidelines for the practitioner and comprise the first two limbs of hatha yoga. See Chapter III, *Yoga in a Nutshell*, pp. 22-23.

as interviewing process. Subjecting the material to my own kinesthetic experience was one tool that I used, since as a dancer my bodily experience is a primary way of knowing.

Due to the enormity of material generated from the above-mentioned questions, I focus this paper on the most obvious and reoccurring themes. I begin with a chapter entitled *Dance in a Nutshell*, a discussion on the definition of dance in order to establish a common ground for all interviewees. This chapter is followed by an examination of yoga, a burgeoning and rapidly changing modality that has multiple forms, in the United States in 2006. I discuss the American yoga landscape and its practice including the effects on body, mind, and spirit in *Yoga in a Nutshell*. At this point it is possible to delve into the following question: *What Attracts Dancers to Dance and Yoga*, encompassing the experiential material extracted from the original interviews. The aspect of what compels, draws the dancer into this world seemed integral to learning more about the tendencies that all dancers may share. For instance, would this initial attraction also leave the aspirant vulnerable due to their particular affinities and means of operating and learning?

Additionally, I included a chapter that covered and explored the needs and challenges of the dancer, the importance of understanding body type and discernment between structural and muscular limitations, as well as the experiential responses to the question pertaining to dance and yoga injuries. This chapter, *The Dancer Practices Yoga*, seemed an obvious choice due to practical application of my study, which is to encourage dancers to use yoga as an auxiliary technique, and to point to the concerns that should guide a dancer in yoga practice.

Not surprisingly, the degree of severity and number of injuries ranged drastically from dancer to dancer, and necessitated a closer look at body type and personality/drive, as well as dance repertory and the demands of disparate dance companies and choreographers. For instance, some companies were far more athletic and injury prone than others, as were some individuals. Unable to address all material in this portion of the interview process, I chose to focus on general reoccurring themes that surfaced within the context of the interviews, and draw opinion-based conclusions about the common ground between the injuries within dance, within yoga, and also the correlation between the yoga and dance injuries experienced by the individual.

Yoga Benefits: The Dance Behind the Eyelids includes many unsurprising findings: there were a veritable plethora of benefits discussed, in fact, far too many to include in their entirety. Here again, I chose to use a select few dancers as a framework from which to examine, integrate, and support their common themes with additional stories. As with the chapter discussing injury, this is a rich area for future study, and I will explore the correlation between dance and yoga regarding injury and benefits in future writings. I hope that my work will also encourage others to work on this extremely fertile ground.

There were also some surprising findings, as well. In my experience, I have viewed yoga as only a positive force, and there were a number of observations from my interviews that indicated potential pitfalls and limitations that I had not previously explored to a great degree. As always, ignorance has limited returns, and I feel grateful for the illumination this study has provided for myself, and which I, in turn, now intend

to share with others. I dedicate a portion of this paper to this particular area in order to add the objectivity and richness that the criticisms and limitations discussed provide.

Whereas many interviewed within my research have happily chosen yoga as either a new direction entirely or as a supplement or replacement to dance training for any combination of performance, teaching, and improvisation, this was not the case for all. A number of interviewees had found that yoga was not a complete substitute for dance, due to the lack of spatial exploration, and practical missing vocabulary such as the arabesque.

Despite the criticism, all involved in the study agreed that there remain enormous potential benefits in the practice of yoga for dancers. Regardless of one's particular tendencies, there remains an incessant need for bringing awareness to an injured or at-risk area to foster a balanced practice. With a knowledgeable teacher, yoga provides an environment for this type of observation and growth to take place. For example, if you are a hypermobile dancer you must focus incredibly on stability. If you have a tendency to generate self-abuse in your approach, you must find a way to practice observation versus judgment, as well as develop a balance between discipline and letting go. Yoga allows for observation of, and moderation of, these tendencies.

Veritably, the practice of yoga as a solely physical discipline is often not enough. In the driven, it can become a breeding ground for further overuse and imbalance. However, with the yoga sutras as the spine, or heart of the practice, an individual can create a strategy that is supportive of their needs, teaches greater awareness and compassion, and brings a deep balance to body, mind, and spirit.

Additionally surprising for me was the enormity of the impact that was already present, resonating around the dance world, which profoundly impacts almost all dance and dancers, even those who don't directly study yoga. My thesis remains thus: the study of yoga has had an enormous impact on the dance world at large due to its focus on deep inner and physical balance of body, mind, and spirit. As with any good thing, there are potential pitfalls to be mindful of. The typical driven dancer will have the same tendency for overuse in any physical discipline, and the exclusive or overemphasis of areas such as increased range of motion can be devastating for the hypermobile dancer who practices without awareness of his or her own vulnerability and need for stability. Indeed, a practice of yoga proves most helpful when it coincides with much more than what might be apparent at first glance.

Firstly, the origin of the word yoga (derived from the Sanskrit word 'yuj' meaning to unite²) itself calls up the deeper, underlying meaning of union. According to Geeta Iyengar, daughter of the master B.K.S. Iyengar, and an accomplished yogini and teacher in her own right, yoga is a means for deep bliss, serenity and composure in the midst of adversity. Through discipline and discernment, yoga is a study which sharpens the mind and body and which fosters deep consciousness, union of the soul and reveals eternal truth³. Yoga provides a physical, material means of exploring the nature of how we learn through the practice of the archetypal postures of asana, using the physical discipline of asana as a means to explore deeply our physical reality and perception thereof, and begin to observe and build a greater balance of body, mind, and spirit⁴. Asana is a gift in that it

² Geeta S. Iyengar, *Yoga: A Gem for Women* (Timeless Books, 1990), 9.

³ Geeta S. Iyengar, *Yoga: A Gem...*

⁴ Francois Raoult, *Lecture* (November 12, 2006).

provides a physical realm from which to learn about the intangible workings of the mind and emotion. It is my belief that this area of growth and development can have a profound effect on the dancer.

Regardless as to whether or not the student of dance chooses to explore the full breath of yoga, knowing the benefits and pitfalls of yoga will help the dancer determine how she or he can best make use of yoga as an auxiliary physical discipline. Due to the enormity of the topic of yoga, this paper presupposes a general understanding of both yoga and dance, exploring definitions in a minimal and as needed basis. The remaining and untouched portions of data will provide ample fodder for continued research and articles far beyond the scope of this project.

CHAPTER II

DANCE IN A NUTSHELL

What is dance?

What is dance? For the number of people asked, there will likely be an equal number of answers. Perhaps some of these answers will be partial statements: dance is a form of expression, a means to connect to others, an art form, moving images, something to do on Friday nights, an ancient ritual, an act of courtship, a means of building community, or purely a kinetic exercise. Evidence of hieroglyphics depicting dance as an integral part of humankind suggests that dance has been important to our early ancestors. What we now call dance has been present as long as religion or, indeed human culture, and is a settled agreement among scholars. According to Agnes de Mille, a leading dance historian and important choreographer of her time, movement is the source of life itself:

Before man can do anything, he must draw breath, he must move. Movement is the source and condition of life.⁵

De Mille defines several vital ingredients including bodies, time and space,⁶ some of which have been superseded in the computer age. I would add the importance of intention. For although we may notice that someone “dances through life”, or “dances to the beat of a different drummer”, or even choreographs a 4 minute dance in silence, facing the audience, and just standing such as Paul Taylor did in his early, experimental days, it is my opinion that to qualify as a dance one must also include the following two elements, energy and the intention to dance. Firstly, without energy, focus, commitment

⁵ Agnes de Mille, *The Book of the Dance* (New York: Golden Press, 1963), 7.

⁶ Agnes de Mille, *The Book of the Dance*...

and drive inertia will reign. This complements the law of physics that a body at rest stays at rest; something must be involved to turn potential to kinetic energy. Finally, without intention, much of the artwork born out of the highly controversial and revolutionary postmodern period would be impossible to categorize. For example, note how the intention to dance differentiates the following two scenarios: world famous dancer Michael Baryshnikov is running across a rainy street and leaps over a puddle, later the same dancer has a passage from the ballet *La Bayadere* where he runs from upstage left to downstage right, then exists into the wings with a grand jeté. Whereas these two examples may contain the same key ingredients, they are not both supported with Baryshnikov's intention to perform.

For the purposes of this study, however, I will focus more specifically, but not exclusively on American contemporary modern concert dance. That's a mouthful, and conjures up a multitude of images, each based on an individual's experiences. Truly, this genre of dance, born of American and German roots, has evolved from a mixture of social and religious forms, as well as ethnic dance, 19th Century popular American performance forms, vaudeville, and classical ballet. Despite its constantly changing face, modern dance contains characteristics both evolutionary and revolutionary. Were it not for the passionate explorations of Isadora Duncan and the German Expressionists, the converging of artist and mediums of the Diaghilev era, the traveling European stars that acted as scattered seeds of dance that peppered our history of dance in the United States, our African American and melting pot ethnic heritage that has bled into minstrel shows, vaudeville, nightclubs, Broadway and Hollywood, modern dance would not have the

breadth of style and diversity for which it is known.⁷ Contemporary concert modern continues to move and change, and push the envelope, yet it is also culturally situated in a way that makes it uniquely rich as a historical referent and as an extraordinarily rich in-the-moment evocation of kinetic being.

Who is attracted to dance?

This brings me to a second pertinent point of reference drawn from the following question: Who is attracted to dance? The enormity of this inquiry creates the danger of generalizations, because choices have to be made in order to organize the breath of subjective experiences by seeking their commonality. There simply is no “Everydancer”. Whereas there may be a predominant body type, physical availability, or particular work habits that comprise the norm for a particular dance genre, company, or locale, the physical “who”, when examined, can range extensively in the world of concert modern dance. Although many dancers/companies strive to obtain the facile, leggy prototype of the New York City Ballet, this aesthetic is virtually antithetical to the work of such artists as Jawole Willa Jo Zollar of Urban Bush Women or the Cunningham contemporary and creator of authentic movement, Anna Halprin. In fact, there are a variety of companies that are literally capitalizing on physical disabilities such as Mary Verdi-Fletcher’s Dancing Wheels or the male deaf dance company entitled The Wild Zappers. Many continually challenge and redefine who, and therefore what it means to be a dancer. Although for many body type may become a deterrent, it is clear that dance not only crosses, but also defies the boundary of body type.

⁷ Harriet R. Lihs, *Appreciating Dance: A Guide to the World’s Liveliest Art*, 3d. ed. (A Dance Horizons Book: Princeton Book Company, 2002), 1-95.

Life circumstances additionally mark and shape the choice to become a dancer, as well as the level of determination and work habits. The impact of far-reaching variables such as gender, social, economic, and cultural origins, familial, racial, and physical structure can lend a degree of insight to the complexity of this question. For instance, choices are not only related back to our own attractions and repulsions (such as the desire to speak with our body or move through space), but are often deeply affected by those of family, community, and culture. The ‘who’ of this question becomes enmeshed within a plethora of cause and effect responses, creating a multitude of motivations/responses that impact both dancer and community.

Gender is one area that both illuminates complexity to the question of “who is attracted to dance?” as well as reveals the reciprocal impact of the individual on the dance community, and the dance community on the individual. My husband freely admits his motivation to dance was enhanced by his interest in being around all those girls. As a young male college student he thoroughly enjoyed the ratio of male to female dancers. Traditionally, dance has attracted fewer men, particularly in the rural areas, due to the association of dancing with pink tights and tutus, and, by extension, the association of male dancing with effeminacy. Despite the many male artists, some straight and some gay, who have challenged this stigma, much of our culture still retains a lingering association to the Romantic era when dance was about the presentation of woman, sometimes as overt sex workers, and men were superfluous or feminized by association. I enjoy being in a position, as a teacher of the course Dance Appreciation, to further and re-educate these dance audiences by offering a new perspective on dance, gender, and sexuality.

The shortage of male dancers has also had further ramifications. Due to the larger numbers of ballerina/dancer hopefuls, there is a tremendous amount of competition between extraordinarily talented women vying for places in school, scholarships and jobs. This stress has an impact that ripples down from the configuration and hierarchy of a dance company down to the intra-psychic struggle of the individual, and will be an area discussed in relation to the benefits of yoga in a later chapter. A dancer must have a burning drive in order to put forth enough effort to overcome the myriad of potential and realized obstacles. In the pursuit of dance as a career many become obsessed with a drive for perfection in an effort to achieve the balance, power, speed and dexterity for which he or she seeks.

More often than not, this same drive has the lethal potential to bring both fame and ruin. It takes a special kind of person to willingly perform thousands of tendus within any given month. There must be a will to challenge, to strive for the highest fulfillment of personal and physical expression. What I have learned to notice is the difference between a nurturing and destructive motivation. When asked, a dancer would likely respond that it is perfection that they seek, but consider the meaning of perfection as seen in a rose or a snowflake. The beauty that I find in a single blossom reflects my experience with that rose. When I pay attention I am affected on every level. The scent, the color, and the feel of the velvet petals are all part of my unique experience with this living form that has fulfilled its deepest creative expression. Of course, the rose remains unaffected by my thoughts or feelings. Contrarily, the dancer who holds him or herself up to a cultural ideal or perception of perfection risks not only wilting under his or her own criteria, but also the possibility of overlooking the latent possibilities of his/her own

unrealized potential. Redefining beauty and perfection, investigating potential fulfillment of the individual's creative expression is one aspect of acquiring the necessary equipoise, an aspect I have glimpsed more frequently with the study of yoga.

Regardless of the motivation or outcome, the need for discipline and drive remain inherent characteristics of the dancer, both containing the seeds of obstacles and success. We are taught, as dancers, to push. There is little room for being tired, sitting out an exercise or class. The discipline and time commitment are astounding. Too much of a good thing, however, can lead to a depleted energy supply, immune system, injuries from overuse (or misuse), or abuse such as the all too common eating disorders anorexia and bulimia.

To further answer this question of "who is attracted to dance", I have only to make a few observations about the members of my graduating class at Juilliard. There was no set formula other than the element of affluence that provided us the means with which to participate in this program; we were diverse in body shape, size and capabilities. Some of us were chosen for our choreographic or creative ideas, some for our physical facility, many more for their previous years of training and natural ability. During the course of my four years at this conservatory there were some who chose to leave. Although a few were looking for an alternative environment to continue their studies, not everyone was destined to let dance take and remain such a high priority in their life. One almost had to be called to speak with their body, kinetically inclined. For some of us words were not enough. Despite the diversity of body type, size, and former training, most of my graduating class found jobs within the following years and many of us have had long and exciting careers that, like myself, have brought us around the world and

back again. Our success, I believe, was contingent on the following mixture of social and cultural support, luck, or timing, and a balance of talent, passion, and discipline.

My theory is confirmed when I also observe the Mercyhurst Dance Department where I am currently on faculty. Here again, my students burst with a surplus of motivation. Many dancers carry such a high level of discipline that we experience trouble in letting go. Working with these tendencies and excesses has become acutely important for my career as a dancer, as well as an educator. We live in a time that rewards the doers and achievers, and our public school systems, workplaces, and cultural climate breed negative connotations towards just “being”. I know well the effects of a driven mind and body. This is an area of deep imbalance that many dancers share with the majority of our population.

In summary, the question: “Who is attracted to dance?” is far more complex at closer examination, and encompasses a large variety of unique stories as well as predictable patterns. The following are the predominant common threads: greater numbers of women than men, a universal drive for perfection or facile body, an inexplicable love of movement and drive that can, and often does lead to overuse and misuse, and a tendency for imbalance of discipline over letting go.

My personal attraction to dance:

What is it that drew me to dance? For myself, I believe that I was drawn to the world of dance because of my desire to gain greater physical balance, dexterity and control. At the time I began dancing I was following my childhood desire to join a theater company and become an actress. Due to my interest in becoming the greatest actress of the world, I

felt that I needed to empower myself with the kinesthetic “body of knowledge” that the discipline of dance provided. I not only sought to gain a greater choice in my livelihood (wider variety of parts to play), but also to answer some calling deep within my own being. I knew that further schooling was necessary in order to have something of significance to say from the stage, and I landed at the Juilliard School of Dance, and began to develop the “how tos” and “wherewithals” of being centered and “on your leg”. I discovered that this was both a challenge as well as a refreshing change from the world of theatre where the lines of make believe and reality had felt blurred.

Ultimately, however, I chose to wed the two callings, by dancing for a company that was inextricably theatre and dance, set movement and improvisation, work and play, and illusion and magic. For me, this was theatre at its best, the theatre of the body. Along the way there were many influential teachers that guided me both towards and away from their own style. Anna Sokolow, whom I also danced for, was extremely helpful in bridging this gap. I found in her a deep resonance of truth and integrity in the content of her work while studying at Juilliard. I was consistently cast in her pieces, and then later invited to join her company the year after graduation. Each teacher offered another rung on the ladder that I was climbing, unaware of what I might find at “the top”. As I can now see with greater clarity, I was building my own direction, not having fit in to any mold that I saw before me. I trusted my instincts, those who rang “true” as an artist, followed my heart and did my best to fill the shoes that lay before me.

But what was it that initially got me to move? Was it the thrill of the performing arts? Was it the liberation from the text, the ability to express what was, for myself, inexpressible? To this day I am called to move, but there have been many hindrances and

side journeys. This has prompted me to consider what would I say to my own students that would encourage them to follow their dreams, stay true to a “path with heart” and avoid any pitfalls that I may have encountered through injury or personal tendencies. This paper is my offering to this new path of which I dedicate myself, the path of a teacher, a guide.

CHAPTER III

YOGA IN A NUTSHELL

Explaining yoga could easily occupy an entire thesis in and of itself. Indeed, there are thousands of books about the subject, many of which line the shelves of my library, bedside table, living room, and yoga studio. Yoga is a journey that unveils layers of truth in the physical, spiritual, and mental realm, bringing the aspirant into an enlightened body, mind, and state of being on every level. According to Indian yoga master B.K.S. Iyengar, it is a system that rejuvenates the body and brings simplicity and peace to the mind, therefore filling reservoirs of hope within that enhances contentment and health.

The practice of yoga aims to overcome the limitations of the body. Yoga teaches us that the goal of every individual's life is to take the inner journey to the soul. Yoga offers both the goal and the means to reach it.⁸

All of the obstacles and means to achieving this deep state of inner and outer quietude and awareness were actually outlined by Patanjali, a sage who compiled the philosophy and practice of yoga in scriptures called the Yoga Sutras. Although the time of Patanjali's life and work is unknown, the transcription of the sutras in writing dates to the time of the Roman Empire. There are four chapters: Samadhi-Pada (Chapter on Ecstasy, which outlines what yoga is), Sadhana-Pada (Chapter on the Path of Realization, that discusses the practice of becoming enlightened), Vibhuti-Pada (Chapter on Powers, explains the by-products of yoga), and finally Kaivalya-Pada (Chapter on Liberation). Each chapter is filled with verses of terse writing that string together in a hierarchical

⁸ B.K.S. Iyengar, *The Path to Holistic Health*, ed. Ranjana Sengupta (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2001), 10.

manner forming “threads”, or sutras, of knowledge concerning the system and practice of yoga. Since the development of yoga occurred in an oral tradition, the writings are dense in nature, and require time and study for understanding, assimilation, and evolution for the benefits to flow forth. Patanjali is not solitary heir, or author, of yoga. Prior to Patanjali there were numerous schools dating back to the opening centuries of the Common Era, however Patanjali’s school came to be known as both authoritative, as well as the climax of this long period of development. Despite the fact that the exact dates and details of Patanjali’s life remain disputed, it is possible that his life paralleled the development of Buddhism, which would explain some of the many parallels found.⁹

Many people are drawn to this system in order to reap the benefits that include enhanced awareness, strength, agility, balance, flexibility, as well as reduced stress and gained perspective and peace of mind. Iyengar describes the passages in yoga as containing five stages: arambhavastha (the physical level), ghatavastha (mind and body), paricayavastha (body and intelligence become one), and nispatti avastha (the stage of perfection). It is from these stages that spiritual awareness flows into the individual alleviating the multilevel experience of “pain”, or Duhkha.¹⁰

What dancer would not wish to be free of physical, mental, and emotional limitations? Many dancers are initially brought in by the physical benefits, but discover that the system of Astanga yoga (which literally breaks down into eight supporting limbs of the yogic tree, each involving a sequential stage of which asana is only one)¹¹ is helpful on a much grander scale. The first limb, yama, consists of five universal ethical

⁹ Georg Feuerstein, PhD, *The Yoga Tradition: Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*, (Arizona: Hohm Press, 2001), 213-233.

¹⁰ B.K.S. Iyengar, *The Path to Holistic Health...*, 12.

¹¹ B.K.S. Iyengar, *The Path to Holistic Health...*, 29.

precepts that include non-harming, truthfulness, non-stealing, moderation/chastity, and non-grasping, and has to do with how the individual relates to the world. Niyama, the second limb, describes the code of ethics for self: cleanliness (sauca), contentment (santosa), self-discipline (tapas), self-study (svadhyaya), and isvara pranidhana (dedication to God, or surrender). The practice of asana (physical postures) is third, and the practice of pranayama, breathing, is the manipulation of life force. Pratyahara (detachment), is the fifth limb, and the remaining three are: Dharana (the drips of concentration), dhyana (the steady stream of focused awareness, or meditation), and samadhi (enlightenment/bliss).¹² Each limb is equally vital to the whole, and bears fruit that is pragmatic for the practitioner/dancer in ways that will be discussed throughout the following chapters.

Yoga in the United States: 2006

This is not to say that the entire population of yoga enthusiasts¹³ in the United States is even aware of the remaining seven limbs of yoga. We must first determine how yoga is practiced in the United States in 2006. Very often, what we know as yoga has been stripped of its spiritual content. This reflects American culture. As a nation, we are in hot pursuit of the body beautiful. Look to any fashion magazine, and even *Yoga Journal* itself, to see what barometer we hold our own self-image and practice up to. In fact, many (or dare I say most) people stumble onto the spiritual aspects once they begin their journey, but few seek out the spiritual aspects initially. Many serious practitioners,

¹² Mira Mehta, *How to Use Yoga*, (Rodmell Press, 1998), 9.

¹³ Patricia Mees reports that in 1998 7 million people practiced yoga, whereas within five years this leaped to about 18 million. *Physician & Sports Medicine* (May 2005).

teachers, and yoga enthusiasts feel that what we get here in the United States is, at best, a watered-down version.

There are some who believe that the modifications resulting from the transference of yoga to the United States directly correlate to the nature of cultural exchange.

American culture has taken a fancy to Indian spirituality and fashion as well as yoga.

This cultural embrace can be found in the number of high profile individuals involved in yoga, the adapted trendy dress and popular henna tattoos, the display on magazine and album covers, including, not surprisingly, by the master of promotion herself, Madonna.

Whereas the practice of yoga may seem Indian to Americans, the American practice of yoga may not appear to be Indian to the South Asian. Marina Budhos researched this cross-fertilization, finding the exchange to resemble new love, lacking in the depth that comes of an established relationship:

The current popularity of yoga in America is the culmination of at least two centuries of cross-cultural interactions between India and the West. Yet like a long distance love affair, each side caught in the first blush of infatuation, it is a relationship that has been characterized as much by long-encrusted stereotypes and projections as by earnest respect. India is often seen as the eternal source of ancient wisdom, and the West is the golden gate to technology and prosperity.¹⁴

Budhos conducted a variety of interviews in order to validate and explore the above supposition and to learn about the many assumptions and experiences that have resulted from this cultural exchange. One such individual, Siddharth Dube, who had grown up practicing yoga in India, was shocked at the yoga practice in America, commenting that it was like a circus. To Dube, Americans had confused yoga with beautification and youth. It was highly competitive and injury prone:

¹⁴ Marina Budhos, "Out of India" *Yoga Journal* (April 2002) : 93.

To me, the yoga here is completely athletic, without any safeguards, particularly around breathing. Everything I was taught, not to compete, not to focus on the perfect position, not to strain, to rest systematically. Here it's the importance of sweating in a gym, which to me is the antithesis of yoga.¹⁵

Others believe that these adaptations are due to the lack of true understanding of this ancient form. Georg Feuerstein, a ferocious academic on the subject of yoga, believes that the enthusiasm for creativity in the teaching of yoga has contributed to the divorce of asana from its fundamental roots. Rather than receiving new and innovative approaches, Feuerstein believes that we are getting a mere mutation that is reflective of the lack of experience and limitations of the multitude of teachers we now harbor in the United States.

In America especially, it would seem there is a penchant for innovation among yoga teachers, as if the old teachings were outmoded and no longer useful. Often, however, the very teachings that are being dismissed have not been mastered at all, and so one can make no claim about their efficiency or inefficiency.¹⁶

Feuerstein goes on to quote Swami Janakananda, who shares this same point of view; that we are trying to reinvent the wheel.

You may pretend to know everything, but all you do is change yoga according to your limited knowledge. Well, then you end up going round in the circles of your own illusions and expectations.¹⁷

Feuerstein lionizes humility as the mark of ego-transcendence, and argues persuasively that there is something beyond having a flexible and fit body.

I think it would do us good to give yoga more time to work its wonders in us-not just in providing a flexible and fit body but also a mind capable of self-transcendence and deeper levels of spiritual realization. Let's not be too hasty in dismissing the age-old traditional forms evolved by thousands of masters.¹⁸

¹⁵ Marina Budhos, "Out of India"...181.

¹⁶ Georg Feuerstein, "Reinventing the Wheel" *Yoga International* (November 2001) : 24.

¹⁷ Georg Feuerstein, "Reinventing the Wheel..."

¹⁸ Georg Feuerstein, "Reinventing the Wheel"...26.

Feuerstein characterizes traditional practice as a spiritual practice that enables us to experience our true nature, unclouded by small minded and limited doctrines.

That is it seeks to guide us to our true nature, which lies beyond the limited concerns of religion or philosophy. It seeks to give us the key to mind and ego-transcending enlightenment, or the awakening from the dream of conventional existence. Yoga, as is true for any authentic spiritual tradition, is about freedom rather than rigid doctrines or mere belief. It is experiential and experimental. Because of this, it gives us the possibility of real self-mastery, which when attained also empowers us to become constructively innovative.¹⁹

These strong feelings indicate the importance of choosing a teacher who is both knowledgeable and grounded in the study of kinesiology and roots of yoga (incorporating body/mind/spirit), one who is mindfully attentive and aware, and who practices - with discernment. One reason for choosing a teacher with discretion is the definitive relationship between the objective assessment of a teacher and the growing awareness and development of the subjective experience of the individual (the teacher gives a verbal and/or visual reference point that allows the student to have a cognizant experience, and therefore the opportunity to clarify the way in which they work). This relationship not only deepens the experience of the practitioner, but when it is absent from teaching and learning it blurs the line for discerning and prioritizing the value of the external (objective) viewpoint with that of the subjective experience of the individual. Ideally, the objective and subjective experience of the practitioner will, over time and disciplined study, become less disparate.

The importance of finding a qualified teacher cannot be overemphasized. I have therefore chosen to include a number of additional reflections on this complex, integral and dynamic relationship. Chapter five discusses aspects such as the dancer/teacher

¹⁹ Georg Feuerstein, "Reinventing the Wheel..."

relationship, choosing a teacher, as well as the responsibility of the teacher to student, and pros and cons of utilizing touch. I recall the advice given to me by my teacher, Judith Hanson Lasater, physical therapist, world-renowned teacher, and yogini. Lasater recommended that when you first come to a teacher you bring with you a wide, loose net, one with a great deal of space to sift through the teachings with attention and awareness. If there is a resonance of truth and growing trust the net can become more narrow, so that less information passes back out again, until the connection and trust has been so deeply established, that it is appropriate and safe to use the finest net from which to catch every pearl of wisdom.²⁰

The Practice of Yoga:

Body

The benefits of yoga are hard to articulate in scholarly prose because yoga presupposes a unity of self and a relationship of self with environment, which can't be expressed in the analytic, atomistic discourse of the west. For the purposes of clarification and at the risk of reifying the fragmentation of self, the benefits of yoga can be broken down into the following three categories: body, mind, and soul. In an effort to attain clarity, I will refer to the mystery of *self* by examining various frameworks such as the body, mind, and soul, in hopes of capturing a glimmer of the *whole*. We must, however, bear in mind the distortions inherent in the act of divorcing body from mind and spirit. As Feuerstein has argued, this act is antithetical to the practice and philosophy of yoga.

²⁰ Judith Hanson Lasater, *Lecture*.

Nevertheless, observing one's self as a physical entity is a foundational aspect of hatha yoga. Asana connects us with the physical aspect of the self. When we are connected and aware of physical experience, this experience becomes the ground for an experience of all aspects of consciousness.

Hatha yoga addresses and introduces mind and spirit as it is manifested through our physical reality. For example, we can kinesthetically and psychologically feel our imbalances, obstacles, levels of or lack of awareness, as well as our *vrittis*, our mental state and fluctuations of mind. We take a seat on the mat in order to facilitate awareness by focusing on an internal assessment, and this first level of awareness often pertains primarily to the physical body. It is easy to see how the areas of improved health, rehabilitation, and stress reduction all reflect on additional areas of psychological and mental wellbeing. Many are motivated to join a yoga class in order to enhance their physical experience, since on the mat one has the opportunity to explore what is occurring in that moment on a structural and muscular level. It is here that the imbalances of the body are revealed and addressed through the use of poses and counter-poses, props and modifications, attention, and ongoing deepening awareness. As one progresses through the course of the class or asana series, the various systems of the body are addressed on both a conscious and unconscious level. One can feel the physiological changes throughout the experience, and in particular at the close of class, in the final relaxation pose, Savasana.

Throughout the process of mindfully bringing the body through a series of asanas, profound physiological support is given to such systems as the neuro-musculoskeletal, cardiovascular, and respiratory systems. Telles, Nagarathna, Nagendra, and Desiraju,

found that of 40 physical education teachers with an average of 8.9 years of training, and 3 months of yoga training, there was significant improvement of general health. Some of the areas noted were reduced blood pressure and weight, increase in lung function, and decreased autonomic arousal (increased relaxation).²¹

Although it is possible to experience injury and harm from a yoga practice, proper technique, good training, and matching the individual's needs to an appropriate yoga style can have a dramatic effect on the overall safety and benefits experienced. Many physicians (particularly those who have experienced the benefits first-hand) advocate yoga for their own patients to assuage such conditions as low flexibility, neck, shoulder, and spine issues, computer shoulder syndrome, and eating disorders.²²

In fact, the musculoskeletal system is deeply affected by the overall harmony and balance acquired as a result of the sequences, and performance of the asanas. For every individual this definition of balance and harmony is radically subjective however, and potentially toxic. Numerous questions spring to mind: Is it possible to have an objective opinion about one's subjective experience? What constitutes the individual's framework for an optimally functioning corporeal experience, and how is the individual's experience impacted if balance becomes an end-goal? Furthermore, is this pursuit a quest for an unattainable ideal or can it exist as a focalization that includes understanding and value of difference, asymmetry, and/or disabilities from one individual to another? My belief is that our perspective impacts our life experience; and our yoga practice begins with our

²¹ Telles, S, R. Nagarathna, H.R. Nagendra, T. Desiraju, "Physiological Changes in Sports Teachers Following 3 Months of Training in Yoga" *Indian Journal of Medical Sciences* (1993) vol. 47, no. 10 : 235-8.

²² Patricia Mees, "Yoga Participation Surges" *Physician and Sportsmedicine* (May 2005) vol. 33, no. 5 : 12-15.

obstacles. Therefore it is not a question of whether or not we are in balance, but rather if we are in a dynamic process of listening to what is arising and responding accordingly. Truly, the body, although bilateral, rarely works in a purely bilateral manner. Thomas W. Myers, author of a wonderfully rich manual for movement therapists, describes the profound layers of connectivity that run through the body as anatomy trains. Myers' belief is that our abilities to heal coincide with our ability to listen, and that we are often "derailed" anatomically, as a result of imbalance.

The heart of healing lies in our ability to listen, to perceive...²³

Any deviation from the optimal course of joint, skeletal, and muscular action results in compensation, strain, fixation, tension, and over time has the power to alter bone shape.²⁴ Therefore, the practice of asana requires a proportionate attention given to the interaction and balance and imbalance of muscle pairs, awareness and usage of gravity in the agonist (working, contracting muscle), and antagonist (working, lengthening muscle) relationship, as well as the overall possible balance and optimal effectiveness of musculature.

The musculoskeletal system does not act of its own accord, however, and is driven by the impulses and superhighway of the nervous system, thus unifying all actions and activities.²⁵ Truly, the nervous system is not only responsible for our physical response, but also for activities of the mind that include thinking, emotions, and

²³ Thomas W. Myers, *Anatomy Trains: Myofascial Meridians for Manual and Movement Therapists* (Churchill Livingstone, 2001), 1.

²⁴ Thomas W. Myers, *Anatomy Trains*...1-17.

²⁵ H. David Coulter, *Anatomy of Hatha Yoga: A Manual for Students, Teachers, and Practitioners* (Honesdale, PA: Body and Breath, Inc. 2001), 21.

cognition,²⁶ however the effects of yoga on the mind will be discussed in a separate section.

Keeping in mind that the body is a closed kinetic chain, and that all parts of the body are interrelated, it is easy to see how any one area that is not optimally operating will have ramifications felt throughout. The systematic asana journey provides an opportunity to deepen awareness of our overall functionality, and thereby create appropriate adjustments when there is an imbalance or dysfunction. Asana practice generally consists of body openers and warm-up, active standing poses, seated poses and/or inversions, and closes with a restorative sequence, and Savasana. Each class is optimally formulated with an overall focus or objective that alternatively addresses movements in all directions of the spine (flexion and extension in the sagittal plane, lateral flexion, in the frontal plane, and rotation in the transverse plane), as well as active and restorative focalizations. With knowledgeable sequencing, one can set up a successful environment for the support of a balanced neuro-musculoskeletal system, and even tailor make the sequence to adapt for such needs as mood, level of energy, physical imbalance, menstruation, fatigue, illness, or injury.²⁷

The cardiovascular system is also supported through yogasana. The muscles of the vascular system are either stimulated (as in energizing poses such as standing poses and unsupported backbends) or relaxed (as in restorative poses), vasoconstriction (the judicious transference of blood), vasodilatation (affecting the degree in which the arterial diameter is increased), and blood pressure is either affected, raised or lowered

²⁶ H. David Coulter, *Anatomy of Hatha Yoga*...29.

²⁷ Linda Sparrowe, with Yoga Sequences by Patricia Walden, *The Woman's Book of Yoga & Health: A Lifelong Guide to Wellness* (Shambala, 2002).

accordingly, all which in turn affects the rate, blood pressure (over time), and overall health of the heart and circulatory functions²⁸. The endocrine system is additionally addressed by the variety of different physical shapes, thereby affecting the circulation and subsequent release of hormones, the organs of assimilation, elimination, and reproduction are squeezed and flushed, inviting greater circulation of blood, oxygen, and nutrients to be exchanged, the nervous system is excited or calmed, and reflexive body control are also affected.

Because the body remains the house of our spirit, and also the foundation for all aspects of the yoga practice, it is generally recommended that the beginning yoga practitioner first emphasize asanas such as standing poses (to bring confidence and direction, bilateral balance into the body, and facilitate range of motion) and restoratives (in order to establish the counter pose for action and discipline, and develop the ability to receive, be, and take in). These asanas prepare the body for the more challenging seated and inverted poses, as well as the accompanying changes that in turn affect the body, mind, and spirit.

The following information is excerpted from *A Physiological Handbook for Teachers of Yogasana* concerning the benefits of yogasana and the dancer's nemesis: aging. Whereas research compiled by D. C. Nieman revealed a multitude of typical negative effects of aging that include such areas as: increasing depression, loss of skeletal and mental flexibility and range, decrease in heart and lung fitness, decrease in liver and kidney function, degradation of neuromuscular response, decrease of bone strength and density, muscle loss/fat gain, and declining GI function. The following list of yogasana

²⁸ Mel Robin, *A Physiological Handbook for Teachers of Yogasana*, (Arizona: Fenestra Books, 2002), 335.

effects as compiled by M. P. Schatz can be compared: decreasing depression, striking increases in flexibility and range of motion, increases in circulation and respiration efficiencies, increase in liver and kidney function and neuromuscular control, neuromuscular coordination, bone strength, bone density, increase of structural integrity of joints, promotion of muscle strength, endurance, and flexibility, normalization of bowel function, as well as improved digestion.²⁹ The physical benefits are magnificently abundant!

In addition to the benefits listed above, yogasana has been associated with bolstering the immune system by promoting the production of red and white blood cells. If the blood flow is efficient, reflecting a healthy cardiovascular system, then the immune response will generally coincide.³⁰ Yoga asanas demand a greater amount of oxygen, blood, and circulating corpuscles, speeding the delivery of disease fighting cells, and will act as a relief to the immune system by creating a greater capacity for balancing the sympathetic response system with the more productive and healing qualities of the parasympathetic, or relaxation response.³¹

A general rule of thumb – often ignored in the field of dance due to circumstance – is to let the state of the body affect the content of practice. For example, Nieman suggests that if the practitioner is ill, pay attention to how this has manifested. If the infection is above the neck, then avoiding inversions (which could spread the infection) and moderating practice is appropriate, however if an infection is developed below the neck and involves fever, the preferred course is inaction; let the body rest in order to

²⁹ Mel Robin, *A Physiological Handbook*...500.

³⁰ Mel Robin, *A Physiological Handbook*...390.

³¹ Mel Robin, *A Physiological Handbook*...

avoid further weakening the system.³² Clearly the body, our corporeal home of mind and spirit, stands to benefit from a yoga practice, if only for expanding our discernment, physical awareness, and potential.

Note how the respiratory system is remarkably affected. B.K.S. Iyengar states that the average person takes in about 550 cubic centimeters of air in a normal inhalation, whereas in a deep breath cycle the number jumps to close to 3,000 cubic centimeters.³³ Although lung capacity ranges from person to person, it is easy to see how the practice of pranayama increases lung capacity. The gas flow and exchange is practiced through a variety of specific exercises that are designed to bring about a state of wellbeing. For instance, a normal breath out accompanied by a longer inhalation will energize the body, whereas a long slow exhalation will emphasize the moment of letting go, inviting the practitioner to delve into a state of surrender, awareness, and bliss.

Mind

Subsequently, the mind is another part of the whole that is largely affected by the practice of yogasana, the fruits of which can be a tremendous boon for the type A personality, driven for perfection. A balanced mind has the ability to gain a much needed objective perspective of the larger picture that can filter down to daily practice, and beyond to cellular awareness. Since the practice of breathing is interpreted with such creativity throughout various dance and yoga traditions, I have elaborated on a few varying approaches and theories in order to reflect the significance and power of this

³² Mel Robin, *A Physiological Handbook*...390.

³³ B.K.S. Iyengar, *Light On Pranayama: The Yogic Art of Breathing* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002), 15.

magnificent practice. I frame my observations within the philosophical context of the yoga sutras of Patanjali.

In Sanskrit, the second yoga sutra refers to the power of breath: *Yogah cittavrtti nirodhah* (yoga is the yoking of, the resolution, or quieting of the fluctuations of the mind).³⁴ The fact that this yoga sutra is second only to yoking body, mind, and soul through presence demonstrates the hierarchical importance of quieting and steadying the mind (indeed both the practice and fruit of yoga). B.K.S. Iyengar likens the human mind to a drunken monkey, swinging wildly from one branch of a tree to another randomly about the jungle.³⁵ Through the practice of yoga this circular chatter of the mind can be quieted, allowing deep knowing to arise from within. The practice of Pranayama is the most direct way to alter the state of mind, although all asanas can be highly effective for this same purpose, in part because of the role of breath in asana, and its participation in the ability to focus.

It is helpful to better understand what the yoga of breath is (and how the role of the yoga sutras supports this limb of yoga) by contrasting yoga with a differing somatic discipline. For example, the system of Pilates has similarly adapted the use of breath work as a foundational aspect of Body/Mind fitness. Although the methodology of pilates is, in part, yoga derived, the overall focus of fitness and end-gaining radically differentiates this somatic discipline from that of yoga. Looking to the origins and overall development of pilates can further enlighten the source of similarities, usefulness for the dancer, as well as the differences:

³⁴ I. K. Taimni, *The Science of Yoga* (The Theosophical Publishing House, 1961), 6.

³⁵ Judith Hanson Lasater, *Lecture*.

Pilates, originally created by Joseph Pilates in an effort to offset childhood teasing and ill health, came into fruition during Pilates' internment during World War I. While in the camp, Pilates further developed a system of exercises derived from influences including gymnastics, bodybuilding, self-defense, and boxing. In 1926 Pilates relocated to New York City, where he began working with a variety of actors and dancers including stars of Broadway, Hanya Holm, Martha Graham, and George Balanchine.³⁶ This crossover cannot be underestimated in the development of modern dance techniques (observe the use of breath and abdominal usage in the Graham contraction).

Pilates has become further integrated into a variety of modern dance techniques and since then been incorporated, copied, and developed, and is comprised of basic principles that include conscious use of breath to focus the mind. The basic principles include breath/abdominal awareness, control and placement of pelvis and ribcage, scapular movement and stabilization, and head and cervical placement. In short, pilates focalizes primarily on alignment, muscular fitness (the body beautiful), development, toning, and stabilizing of the core.³⁷ The class progresses from a brief, mobilizing warm-up to exercises that alternatively tone the muscles of the front and back body and, to a progressively smaller degree, in rotation, limbs, and (minimally) to the lateral body. To a minor degree pilates partially parallels work in two of the eight yoga limbs, asana and breath.

According to dancer/yogini Gina Russell, the major difference between pilates and yoga lies in the approach as well as the intention. Whereas the main goal of pilates is

³⁶ Allan Menezes, *The Complete Guide to Joseph H. Pilates' Techniques of Physical Conditioning* (Hunter House Publishers, 2000), 1.

³⁷ Moira Stott Merrithew, *Comprehensive Matwork: Stott Pilates, the Contemporary Approach* (Merrithew Corporation, 2001).

to create core stability and tone abdominals through the use of the limbs, yoga uses the limbs to create a balance of stability (of outer frame) and spaciousness for the inner, and entire being.³⁸

Breathing techniques also differ. Author and Pilates practitioner Allan Menez states that the breath work benefits the student with fluidity and awareness of movement, increased capacity for mental focus, overall health and deep internal listening³⁹, however the emphasis is still primarily to enhance abdominal tone. Also, pilates focalizes on breathing in the nose and out the mouth, (specifically to maintain and stimulate abdominal tone), whereas yoga is generally performed to create space for the organs and muscular balance, and predominantly utilizes nostril breathing in order to benefit from the body's natural temperature regulation and filtration systems located in the nasal passageways.⁴⁰

This is not to diminish the value of pilates; in fact, it has something to offer the dancer. The overall focus of pilates, (physical health and fitness) in conjunction with the attention to details such as body placement and core strength, can be extremely useful for the individual who, like myself, has difficulty integrating upper to lower body due to a combination of hypermobility in the joints and hypomobility, specifically in the lumbar spine. I have a student with a similar musculoskeletal make-up to that of my own, and have noted her attraction to pilates, and need for finding modifications similar to my own.

What is missing is difficult to put into words. When I taught pilates I know that I used my skills in yoga (and dance) to deepen connection, observation, and body

³⁸ Gina Russell

³⁹ Allan Menezes, *The Complete Guide...2*.

⁴⁰ Mel Robin, *A Physiological Handbook...356*.

knowledge. I know that I enjoyed, for a time, creatively using the series of exercises within the context of the class, and that I have benefited from the information for rehabilitation and teaching purposes. I felt limited however, I missed the spiritual aspect, philosophical context, and more complete movement vocabulary (such as downward facing dog, a beautiful example of upper to lower body integration), and, most importantly, the flow of breath.

Both breathing disciplines are taught separately and as part and parcel of the individual exercises, however I have never spent an entire pilates class on breathing exercises alone, as I have in yoga. In truth, there is some interplay and influence from the science of yoga that permeates the variety of somatic disciplines, and dance. In fact, no one can really “own” breath work. Breathing goes hand in hand with life, and our very experience of being alive gives us myriad opportunities to explore this aspect of our being (whether or not it is our conscious intention to do so). Consider the words of Isadora Duncan:

I spent long days and nights in the studio, seeking that dance which might be the divine expression of the human spirit through the medium of the body's movement. For hours I would stand quite still, my two hands folded between my breast, covering the solar plexus... I was seeking and finally discovered the central spring of all movement, the crater of motor power, the unity from which all diversions of movement are born, the mirror of vision for the creation of dance.⁴¹

I have used what I know, recalling from my every experience, using each discipline to enhance the other, however I choose to practice under the context of one umbrella, yoga. I feel happier when I have an intention behind my practice and teaching

⁴¹ Isadora Duncan, *My Life* (Liveright, 1928).

that incorporates a balance of space and support, process and integration of body, mind, and soul, and, most importantly for the driven: the balance of discipline and surrender.

Quite simply, our cultural context, which tends to minimize the importance of the philosophy and integration of spirit due to the overwhelming preoccupation with fitness, health, and beauty, magnifies my own tendencies. For this reason, yoga is my chosen medium of preference from which I process the wealth of thoughts and ideas on this subject.

Laban Movement and Bartenieff Fundamental specialist Peggy Hackney suggests using the following situations to tune in to your breathing and thus impact your state of being: when experiencing exhaustion, feeling disconnected or far away from yourself, in situations with elevated tension or pressure, during healing from injury or illness, to attain greater mobility or stability, when connecting or communicating with another. Each situation has the potential of being greatly enhanced from breath awareness. For example, breathing can aid in internal integration, cultivation of energy, release of tension, enhanced oxygen flow and therefore regeneration of cell growth, generation of flow of gases and liquids for mobility, increase sense of physical presence, and connection to others.⁴²

Donna Farhi, former dancer and internationally known teacher and yogini, suggests to “let the breath move you” by settling into the natural ebb and flow, the constant state of oscillation. Farhi likens this to learning to dance the waltz. First you become familiar with your partner, and then you let the partner take the lead, until all that is left is the dance itself.

⁴² Peggy Hackney, *Making Connections: Total body Integration Through Bartenieff Fundamentals* (Routledge, 2002), 53-4.

At first you become familiar with your dance partner – how he moves, when he moves, and where he moves... Whatever movement or yoga asana you are practicing, allow the basic expanding, condensing pattern of the breath to express itself through you at all times. Then all your practice will become like a dance in which the invisible partner of the breath guides you.⁴³

The following exercise by Erich Schiffmann utilizes counting backwards from fifty to zero to become more familiar with letting go. Begin by exhaling on the even numbers, and inhaling on odd numbers, until reaching 20, then move into a non-verbal state. This is another way to practice pratyahara, and santosa. By stepping back from habitual thought patterns, you can then become the witness, able to observe the rising thought patterns and levels of awareness (without action) as you move deeper into a state of centered attention. Immersing in your inner stillness, observe the contentment and peace that arises. Like Farhi, Schiffmann specifies *not* to control the breath, but to get out of its way.⁴⁴

One can see the immediate benefit for the dancer, a tangible tool from which to quiet a driven nature or performance anxiety. This process of connecting to the breath is also a way to feel more grounded, and therefore embodied, down to earth. Richard Rosen describes what he calls vertical breath: the inhalation/exhalation as filling and emptying a glass of water, suggesting that each inhalation anchors the tailbone to the floor.⁴⁵ The enhanced awareness to the body's relationship to gravity also produces a rebounding residual effect (more energy), so important for the dancer. Farhi describes it thus:

⁴³ Donna Farhi, *Yoga Mind, Body, & Spirit: A Return to Wholeness* (Henry and Holt & Company, 2000), 29 – 31.

⁴⁴ Erich Schiffmann, *Yoga: The Spirit and Practice of Moving Into Stillness* (Pocket Books, 1996) p. 9, 10.

⁴⁵ Richard Rosen, *The Yoga of Breath: A Step-by Step Guide to Pranayama* (Shambhala, 2002) p. 241.

Any surface of the body that makes contact with the ground must yield to the earth. Actively yielding to the earth creates a rebounding force away from the earth, elongating the body upward into space. Whenever the relationship of yielding to the earth is lost, breathing is restricted.⁴⁶

Interestingly, the system of breathing is one of the few body systems that operate on both an unconscious and conscious level. Additionally, it is possible to note the correlation of breath to state of mind by paying attention to the texture of breath when in an agitated state of mind. For example, when fighting back tears of sorrow the breath comes in short, interrupted, and ragged gasps, whereas in a state of anger the breath can be repressed and bound. When deeply upset, we often have to remind ourselves to take a deep breath; we breathe in order to steady our mind. Iyengar describes this relationship of the breath to the mind, and their reflective nature:

When the breath is irregular, the mind wavers; when the breath is steady, so is the mind. To attain steadiness, the yogi should restrain his breath.⁴⁷

Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh speaks of the breath as a bridge to consciousness and encourages the individual to utilize breath to recover concentration when it has lapsed:

Breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts. Whenever your mind becomes scattered, use your breath as the means to take hold of your mind again.⁴⁸

In part, this quieting and centering is a physical response to the relaxation of the facial muscles, enabling the organs of perception to let go of tension and therefore attain greater concentration, serenity, and equanimity.⁴⁹ This is an extraordinarily powerful aspect of yoga, and although the underlying principles are integrated immediately, it is

⁴⁶ Donna Fahri, *Yoga Mind, Body, & Spirit...5*

⁴⁷ B.K.S. Iyengar, *Light on Pranayama...5*.

⁴⁸ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 15.

⁴⁹ B.K.S. Iyengar, *Light on Pranayama...15*.

generally not emphasized as a separate practice until a serious and steady asana practice has been established and maintained, and only then under the guidance of a qualified teacher.⁵⁰

Soul

One of the main and most common obstacles revealed within the breath cycle is the capacity to let go, and therefore receive effectively. There is an old adage; you have to be able to give, in order to receive. So it is with breath. Karlfried Graf Durckheim describes the inhalation as being “the gift of the exhalation.”⁵¹ More often than not, however the breath is held, as a result of full exhalation never realized. In this manner, and through observation and the guidance of the yoga sutras, one can observe how our use of breath both affects and reveals wellbeing. That pranayama is a limb unto itself suggests that this practice has the power to light our way, if we are willing to listen.

Over the years, balancing the “have tos” of discipline, (abhyasa), with “being” (vairagyabhyam, or surrender) has been an area of which I need constant reminding. The act of holding on to the breath (or a thought that is self limiting) can actually be viewed as a manifestation of attachment, perhaps the most powerful attachment being that to life itself, and has direct correlation to the state of mind and overall sense of wellbeing.

The constantly changing universe is mirrored in our own brief physical incarnation. Yoga helps us to find peace in the process of our evolution, leaving us open to the possibility of expanding awareness and reality versus clinging to circumstances and situations. In dance, this can be a matter of shifting our focus from clinging to a role or

⁵⁰ B.K.S. Iyengar, *Light on Pranayama*...53.

⁵¹ Karlfried Graf Durckheim, quoted by Richard Rosen, *The Yoga of Breath*...240.

position within a company to the more satisfying focus of perfecting and surrendering aspects of the art form. There is a great deal of freedom gleaned when the goal is shifted from the defensive position of coveting a role as opposed to tapping into the essence of dance itself, and serving the art of dance.

In yoga, this is known as learning to identify with pure consciousness, that which is unchanging, divine creativity, or Purusa, as opposed to that which is ever changing, a manifestation of the physical and material world, or Prakrti.⁵² Yoga guru Desikachar describes how identifying with Purusa enables the practitioner to see things as they really are, and that the veil of avidya, or wrong thinking, can then fall away and allow true and limitless understanding (and creativity) to surface.⁵³ It is often the case of mistaken identity, or wrong thinking, when an individual identifies with a limited vision of world and self.

The yoga sutra that best depicts the relationship of the practitioner to divine creativity is found in the third verse of the first chapter: *tada drastuh svarupe avasthanam*, then (when in a state of wholeness) the seer abides (rests) in its essence (within their own true nature).⁵⁴ Judith Hanson Lasater suggests that yoga is a means to support our inner journey, rather than being an end in and of itself. Our true self shines forth when we both take responsibility for ourselves (self discipline) and remain open in the present moment (surrender).⁵⁵ Lasater explains that asana practice can facilitate the

⁵² I.K. Taimni, *The Science of Yoga*...88.

⁵³ T.K.V. Desikachar, *The Heart of Yoga: Developing a Personal Practice* (Inner Traditions International, 1999), 12.

⁵⁴ Judith Hanson Lasater, *Living Your Yoga: Finding the Spiritual in Everyday Life* (Rodmell Press, 2000), 3-6.

⁵⁵ Judith Hanson Lasater, *Living Your Yoga*...

decision to live in the present moment (the basis for meditation) and thereby bring santosa (contentment):

Part of what makes being in the present moment so special is that we rarely do it. Most of the time our minds are fleeing toward the future or lagging in the past. We tend to live in our thoughts about reality and not in reality itself. The problem with this way of living is that it makes us miss the present – and the present is all we really have. Our frequent dissatisfaction with life comes from never fully tasting it exactly as it happens. Asana practice can help us reconnect with the sacred by requiring that we pay attention to the miracle that we are and to the wonder of creation in which we live.⁵⁶

One way in which asana practice supports living in the present is through the practice of observation. As in the practice of pranayama, Savasana (corpse pose) provides the practitioner with an opportunity to transcend into a deeper state of awareness. There are many opportunities within the system of yoga for one to learn to separate themselves from their thoughts, and thereby discern themselves from their own roadblocks. The practice of observation reveals what is truly arising, as well as their power over the individual. Patanjali teaches that misidentification is the root of misery. Recognition enables a person to identify attachments, misunderstandings, and ultimately choose which thoughts to empower with action.⁵⁷

Examining the degree and form of attachment that is present within each moment is another aspect of practice useful to the dancer/practitioner. In this manner, the aspirant increases awareness as to the internal dialogue that might be at play, and has resulting greater capacity to release its hold, and increase levels of concentration, or Dharana, Dhyana, and Samadhi. The following excerpt is from Thich Naht Hahn's meditation on the Pebble, a lovely meditation that can assist in acquiring a detached state as well as

⁵⁶ Judith Hanson Lasater, *Meditation in Motion: Not just a physical practice, yoga asanas can be a doorway to self-awareness* (Yoga Journal March/April 1999).

⁵⁷ Judith Hanson Lasater, *Meditation in Motion...*

quieting the mind through supportive imagery. Hahn encourages the practitioner to first come to a relaxed state, to lower the eyes towards the heart, and imagine being like a water-plant, flowing with the current instead of clinging to the riverbed, which remains motionless beneath the surface.⁵⁸

Imagine yourself as a pebble which has been thrown into the river. The pebble sinks through the water effortlessly. Detached from everything, it falls by the shortest distance possible, finally reaching the bottom, the point of perfect rest. You are like a pebble which has let itself fall into the river, letting go of everything. At the center of your being is your breath... You are no longer pushed or pulled by anything.⁵⁹

Letting go of the attachment to the end product, and also balancing and enhancing the Nervous system can profoundly impact the success of the practitioner/dancer in performance and audition situations. Here the monitoring and managing of the adrenals and nervous system will be crucial to the dancer's overall physical and mental response. Jim Taylor, PhD and Ceci Taylor, MA, MA have explored the correlation between the body/mind state and performance success in their book *Psychology of Dance*, published in 1995. They explore such areas as attitude, motivation, self-confidence, intensity, concentration, imagery, burn out, stress, and injury, explaining the power of awareness and intention, preparation, emotion, physical state, and thought observation: all key factors in the overall success of a dancer. Breathing, progressive relaxation, and even smiling are three of the recommended tools for change once a pattern has been observed and identified.⁶⁰

Since yoga asanas have a variety of effects on the individual in body, mind, and spirit, it is prudent for the teacher/practitioner to study sequencing and asana intent in

⁵⁸ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*...35.

⁵⁹ Thich Nhat Hahn, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*...36.

⁶⁰ Jim Taylor and Ceci Taylor, *Psychology of Dance* (Human Kinetics, 1995), 61.

order to better target an individual's needs. A simple knowledge as to the correlation of head and body positioning to the nervous system can be invaluable. For example, unsupported backbends open the heart, stimulate the brain, and stimulate the nervous system. Contrarily, in order to quiet the mind a series of forward bends is particularly effective. In order to open the heart, stimulate the immune system, and quiet the mind, try the powerful pose Salamba Sarvangasana, or shoulder stand.⁶¹ When battling insomnia, use the reclined poses that have the forehead, chin, and heart in a gentle descending plane in order to evoke relaxation.⁶² Even those who have the luxury of maintaining the majority of their practice under the guidance of a teacher could benefit from an acquired knowledge of yoga therapeutics and evolved self-practice. Deep listening and response to what is arising on a day-to-day and moment-to-moment basis is an essential and sweet by-product that evolves from the continuation of self-practice.

It is easy to see how the dancer can benefit from this internal assessment, because often one is asked to go beyond what has been previously experienced. In this way, the eagerness and self-discipline of a dancer is tempered with discernment, a tool vital for both dancer and teacher alike. Knowing when and how to do inversions, restorative, or active practice as well as how to quiet the mind, open the heart, and stimulate the immune system can literally be a life-saver, and can drastically contribute to the success of the dancer/yogi in adrenalin based situations such as performance and auditions.

Lasater discusses how most individuals in our time virtually live in an extended state of stress, thus creating an imbalance inherent to our times, and damaging to our bodies. In her book *Relax and Renew*, Lasater explains that our culture has become

⁶¹ Mel Robin, *A Physiological Handbook for Teachers of Yogasana*...337-8.

⁶² Judith Hanson Lasater, *Relax and Renew* (Rodmell Press, 1995), 103-115.

dependent upon our ancient responsive system which allows us to call upon resources vital for performance or survival by initiating the “fight or flight” (the sympathetic response) state of mind. Tragically, many of us have become locked in this ancient bodily response due to our modern day stresses.

Anthropologists tell us the body that experiences stress has not changed much over the millions of years of being human. Our ancestors had the same anatomical and physiological characteristics as we who drive freeways and communicate via the information super-highway. We have an ancient body subjected to a modern problem: living with chronic stress.⁶³

In this heightened state of the sympathetic nervous system, the body experiences increased physiological activity such as increased muscle tension, emotional and physical arousal that drives up the heart rate and slows down the long-term systems like growth and cell regeneration. In other words, all systems that are unnecessary for circumstances of life or death are put on hold in adrenalin-based situations such as running for your life, witnessing an accident, or performing in a dance concert. When sustained over time, these circumstances can affect vital functioning. Because operations such as assimilation, elimination, and reproduction are either compromised or shut down in order to deal with the emergency, the strain of increased sympathetic response can eventually lead to fatigue and a compromised immune system.⁶⁴

Herbert Benson, M.D. states that the function of both the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems take place in the same area of the brain, the hypothalamus. In addition, it is possible and necessary to induce the parasympathetic response, or what Benson has famously termed the relaxation response.⁶⁵ Benson explains that the secret is

⁶³ Judith Hanson Lasater, *Relax and Renew* (Rodmell Press, 1995), 3.

⁶⁴ Mel Robin, *A Physiological Handbook...* 336.

⁶⁵ Herbert Benson, M.D., *The Relaxation Response* (HarperTorch, 1975), 96.

to set up the circumstances for this response to occur, and that it is not something that is *done*, but rather a function that is *allowed* to occur. His theory: it is possible to elicit this response best in a quiet environment, but that it is also possible while exercising, by not getting caught up in the cycle of thoughts, and by paying attention to the breath or beat of the music.⁶⁶ Because dancers spend a great deal of their careers in adrenal-driven states, it is vital to examine other stress-inducing factors, such as thoughts, and the management thereof.

It is interesting to note how our mental involvement can stimulate, contribute, and even create stress. Studies have shown that although we have similar responses such as the fight or flight survival response with our brother bear, we differ vastly in how we process emotional and psychological stresses. The following is an excerpt taken from the book *Why Zebras don't Get Ulcers* explaining how humans carry this same life saving strategy into our daily lives, merely by the thoughts we adhere to.

Two people can sit facing each other doing nothing more physically strenuous than moving little pieces of wood now and then, yet this can be an emotionally taxing event: chess grand masters, during their tournaments, can place metabolic demand on their bodies that begin to approach those of an athlete during the peak of a competitive event.⁶⁷

Sapolsky's critical thrust of his writing discusses how humans are quite capable of staying in this state of "fight or flight", thereby activating the sympathetic nervous system for long term usage, which ultimately offsets the efficiency of the body's organ systems.

If you are that zebra running for your life, or that lion sprinting for your meal, your body's physiological response mechanisms are superbly adapted for dealing with such short-term physical emergencies. For the vast majority of beasts on this planet, stress is a short-term crisis, after which it's over with, or you're over with.

⁶⁶ Herbert Benson, M.D., *The Relaxation Response*...8-14.

⁶⁷ Robert M. Sapolsky, *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers* 3d. Ed. (Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 5.

When we sit around and worry about stressful things, we turn on the same physiological system that has evolved for responding to acute physical emergencies, but we turn it on for months on end, worrying about mortgages, relationships, and promotions.⁶⁸

Knowing the consequences of living in a heightened, or agitated state over an extended period of time, as well as the benefits of enhanced skill in managing adrenalin-based situations can be wonderful motivating factors for dancers to learn how to evoke the relaxation response. Roger Cole, PhD has devoted his studies to the variance of brain and body activity in states of sleep, meditation, and deep relaxation. He has been fascinated with the manner in which this response is wired into our brain, and has subsequently developed methodologies as to how to invite, or allow this state of relaxation to occur. Cole describes the necessary conditions for this phenomenon to occur: primarily time, from a minimum of ten minutes to an hour, regular practice, eating well, sufficient sleep, and exercise all increase affectivity.⁶⁹

A yoga class is highly conducive to evoking this state, particularly when the asanas lead up to, and prepare for a final relaxation that lasts from a minimum of fifteen to twenty minutes. Cole discovered that in order to achieve relaxation, one can pass through a number of physiological stages such as (1) Reducing activity of alpha and gamma motorneurons, and muscle spindle stretch receptors by slowly stretching and settling into a restorative asana that supports deep quieting of body and mind. (2) Minimizing of stimulation of posterior hypothalamus (location of fight or flight response) and sympathetic nerve centers in the brain stem, as well as the midbrain reticular activating system. This is done by quieting all sensory input, creating maximum physical

⁶⁸ Robert M. Sapolsky, *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers...*6

⁶⁹ Roger Cole, PhD, *Relaxation: Physiology and Practice* (2004), 15.

comfort, and passive mental state; specifically *paying attention to the exhalation*. (3) Maximize stimulation of the brain centers that inhibit the midbrain reticular activating system and promote parasympathetic activity (anterior hypothalamus). Having the head in a slightly downward position will accomplish this, also use an eye cover or dim light, keep warm, and focus on the exhalation. (4) Choose asanas that open and support the lungs, practice breathing techniques, and meditation to reset respiratory control centers.⁷⁰

Thus, the use of breath and asana is a window into the process and far reaching effects of yoga. Breath, although often taken for granted, is a passageway from the body to mind and to soul. When actively cultivated, it becomes a tremendously powerful and transformative aspect of our reality. In order to fully understand how these, and many other, benefits of yoga directly impact the dancer it becomes necessary to speak about what attracts dancers to dance and yoga, as well as the range of challenges and needs brought forth by this profession.

⁷⁰ Roger Cole, PhD, *Relaxation: Physiology and Practice*...14, 15.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT ATTRACTS DANCERS TO DANCE AND YOGA?

The Intuitive moments where you feel alive: connected to people, first of all initially to oneself, to each other.⁷¹

For each of us that have devoted our career and life direction to the field of dance, there could be as many responses to this inquiry, however there are some commonalities. Many, for instance, are simply drawn to the physical expression, or the idiosyncratic gestures themselves, plus varying techniques. It is interesting to ponder what basic human needs are potentially being met for the individual including a need for acceptance, to be seen, for wholeness, autonomy, creativity, play, growth, purpose, to matter... In many ways to dance can become a strategy for meeting these very basic human needs. Without a closer look at the inherent corporeal connection however, an essential ingredient of commonality is remiss. The following are such categorical examples of the varying potential physical reasons for a commitment and attraction to dance:

- People who love to move. This may include individuals who can range from average mobility to hypermobile, with highly mesomorphic qualities (a lot of consciousness is in their muscles - they need to move in order to feel alive).
- Or they move in order to feel alive, such as a runner, who enjoys the repetitious impact of their body against the pavement. This may be inextricably linked to a low level of quick twitch muscles due to laxity in the joints

⁷¹ Sara Rudner

- Hypermobile: mesomorph/ectomorph blends (e.g., basically all successful ballerinas fall in this category) - movers who can make shapes and have the strength to support them. These body types, as well as the pros and cons of using anthropometric somatotypes as a means of categorization, will be further discussed in chapter five: *The integral role of body type*.
- People with inherent imbalance in their bodies such as scoliosis, leg length discrepancy, or extreme one-sided dominance. These individuals are typically inherently uncomfortable when still, and thus prefer to move, and hence to dance.
- The majority share an inherent high level of discipline required (type “A” personality – which could contain the seeds of such injuries as overuse). A portion of this research will be dedicated to discussing the importance of knowing when to stop, and discernment of ambition and discipline.

Although most dancers find themselves called to respond to life in a deeply kinetic and musical way, there were a variety of rich and differing responses within my queries. Many, but not all were first introduced to dance or some athletic or artistic encounter at a young age, but there were exceptions. Several were late bloomers who, like myself, catapulted headlong into this career with a sometimes rough - hewn and urgent entry. One must have an enormous hunger to dance in order to defy the fleeting nature of this career.

Many dancers reflected that what attracted them to dance encompassed far more than physicality: freedom from a repressive environment – a means to grow both personally and creatively, the possibility of unspeakable beauty, spirituality, a sense of

community, a means of communication and expression, a response to music, or even to recover from a physical imbalance or to overcome lack of speech!⁷² I truly enjoyed hearing the stories of what brought these forty-one dancers to a path similar – and yet different – from my own. For many, this question evoked fond and early memories of dancing around the living room in fuzzy red slippers⁷³, attending Miss Bunny’s School of Ballet⁷⁴, or jumping over puddles in kindergarten at age 5.

Dance Circle:

Throughout time there have been instances of deep family tradition or trade that is passed on from father to son, mother to daughter, and in the following case from father to his daughters. In this case the initial attraction to dance was originally fostered within the home. For instance, both Andra and Ernesta Corvino did not have to search far for their profession. Those of us who have had a long time association with the Juilliard School of Dance, Dance Circle, or even farther back with the Metropolitan Opera, and within the last few decades the Pina Bausch dance company, are familiar with the maestro of dance, Alfredo Corvino, as well as his two amazing daughters, Andra and Ernesta, both of whom grew up surrounded by dance. Ernesta Corvino described the thrill, the nurturing, and excitement of growing up in this special community.

There was a sense of camaraderie, friendship, excitement, love, and sense of family; I always wanted to be around the dancers. Growing up around the MET - not only with the dancers, but the singers and the stagehands...and the productions, it was like the classical European Disneyland. Add to that...the way

⁷² Nina Reiss

⁷³ Peentz Dubble

⁷⁴ Daryl Fowkes

all the dancers, and I think all of their admiration and love for my parents aside, they loved to play with me and...it just meant a lot of fun and a lot of love...⁷⁵

When I asked Andra Corvino if she would be willing to share her introduction to dance she described that for her it was as if she were always dancing. It seemed as if she not only has been compelled to move, but that dancing has defined her, and remained, for her, a constant.

I never remember not dancing. My earliest memories are of being in some kind of movement connected to music, not necessarily athletic. Hyperkinetic movement propelled by music.⁷⁶

Like the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, Andra Corvino found an innate response to music that propelled her out of her chair and into the aisles while experiencing dance performances as an audience member while a young girl. She recalled a story of being in the audience of *Swan Lake*, and how she orchestrated a mini production of the ballet with all of the children during intermission:

My mother took me to rehearsals and classes as an infant: I was viewing and participating dance from the beginning. This followed with performances that my mother took me to see. I was a good audience member, although I had to get up and dance in the aisle during the really great music. People were very good-natured about this. One time there was a huge spread in The Herald Tribune. It was the matinee performance at City Center of *Swan Lake* – I had all the children in intermission doing a synopsis of the entire ballet...⁷⁷

These early roots have gone down to the core; dancing and music have continued to propel her through life. It has become second nature to her, an intrinsic part of her unique make up:

Fifty some odd years later dancing is like an old friend. But it began with bourréeing, piquéing all over the living room and loving it. It was a matter of

⁷⁵ Ernesta Corvino

⁷⁶ Andra Corvino

⁷⁷ Andra Corvino

being exposed to it. I like to move. I was sedentary when I was exhausted...I need to move, to have a kinetic response to music.⁷⁸

Beyond Words:

Eileen Thomas, yogini, masseuse, and former dancer of Susan Marshall's company, asserts that she began dancing in the womb. Her mother had a studio right at home. Beyond the initial introduction, lay a deeper connection to expression and meaning that both moved her beyond words, and came more naturally. For Thomas there was always an underlying yearning to move:

Some innate wanting to move. It was very deeply satisfying...I liked that...embodying the essence of something...the dramatic underline...that was always so satisfying, to keep the deeper connection to the movement, the underlying layer to the movement, {which was} very personal on a certain level, and very expressive...⁷⁹

When Thomas began having knee problems, she took about six months off from performing to reexamine the neuromuscular patterning that she had developed over the years. This eventually led her to yoga, and for a time, a studio where Thomas realized that she had the tendency to hurt herself. While in astanga classes (a highly athletic style of yoga, popular with dancers), Thomas felt negatively influenced by the competitive and external nature, which both reminded her of former ballet training and was contrary to what she was seeking at that time in her career. It was a natural progression to find a style of yoga such as Iyengar, due to the focus on alignment and emphasis on asana adaptation in accordance with the individual's needs.

I was a part of the Jivamukti world for awhile. I kept hurting myself in the astanga stuff...there was such a competitive feeling in these classes...that was so

⁷⁸ Andra Corvino

⁷⁹ Eileen Thomas

not what I wanted - that feeling like I was in a ballet class...kind of watching other people...the attention outward...looking at the more superficial stuff...whenever I felt that... a lot of dancers would go {to Jivamukti}...I would just feel it...and get into that {competing head}. Then I found Genny Kapuler, although not at {the} Iyengar institute...⁸⁰

Like her attraction to dance, Thomas also experienced a very strong connection to yoga that was deeply spiritual. She felt a wholeness from yoga that provided an element of internal calm and also buoyed the end of her dance career with Susan Marshall, particularly as Thomas returned to school for massage and embarked on a new career and quest for alternative forms of income.

...It's {yoga is} a spiritual connection, but its more than that, a psychological connection, but its more than that... {there is} a wholeness or completeness that's unifying, about it that...when I was dancing I felt like it was making me sane...I had a kind of struggle to get through the dancing the last few years...I felt like I was over {dance}, but not out of it...I thought: man, I really shouldn't be there...feeling like I was out of there {the dance scene}, while still trying to do the best I could do⁸¹

Mind-Body Connection:

When I asked Sara Rudner to describe what it was that attracted her to dance she described the communicative possibilities for deep expression, the connection to intuition, to self and others, as well as the joy of moving that for her was inherent. She felt that the dance experiences that she was offered while growing up encouraged this, and that the aspect of human expression of what was beyond words was her ultimate attraction to dance over sports.

The Intuitive moments where you feel alive; connected to people, first of all initially to oneself, then to each other. I love dancing in groups. I used to love folk dancing. I love to run. I could have gone into any sport. I could have been a

⁸⁰ Eileen Thomas

⁸¹ Eileen Thomas

swimmer... I think that dancing itself, as opposed to athletics, had itself held out to my primitive mind at the time, more communicative, more personally communicative possibility. You're feelings were attached; you didn't have to ignore your feelings. I wasn't trained early to ignore my feelings; I didn't have a lot of very strict early training. So I always associated dance {as a movement experience} – as you moved you experienced...that dance and movement was experience, it wasn't like the repetitive action of distant swimming. Although, I find that extremely meditative ... But I can really experience different parts of myself in motion in dance in a way I could never do in athletics.⁸²

Although Rudner also had a rich relationship to somatic disciplines including yoga, and in particular Tai Chi, this expressivity of dance remains her first love:

And also even in the practices of Yoga or Tai Chi -they don't have the range of expressivity. Sometimes that action or picture can speak a thousand words.⁸³

Underlying the expression however, Rudner believes that our body type has an important role as to our profession. Quite simply, the hypermobile person has a greater success rate at achieving the desired range of motion and necessary vocabulary; our natural abilities fuel the pursuit of a career in dance. Beyond that remains an element of mystery that is likely linked to that same underlying connection and expression, coupled with a willingness to have a single-pointed attention.

I have found personally – and it might be the way I am wired or how my body is put together, but we, {anatomist and dancer} Peggy Gould and I, often talk about how people who experience a wide range of motion, they are hypermobile: they were attracted to dance. Early on you'll get kids like that who were pushed into gymnastics because they can do that. But I don't know why some of us become brain surgeons, and some of us become dancers: focus and concentration, expressivity, connection on some level that we don't fully understand, but exists.⁸⁴

Despite Rudner's overriding preference for dance, yoga was an area of active interest and study, an interesting tool to deepen her understanding of the moving body

⁸² Sara Rudner

⁸³ Sara Rudner

⁸⁴ Sara Rudner

and body/mind/spirit connection. At first the immediate attraction to yoga was the physical benefit and structural understanding that had previously been missing and/or based on imitation, as well as the awakening of questions concerning the nature of dance training. This broadened into a means for maintaining greater potential for overall health and centering.

So Initially, yes it was “oh boy, now I understand more about skeletal relationships, more images, but it certainly has deepened as I’ve gone on to understand why do we do that, what is that about?” And then understanding its centering potential, its ability to keep the body healthy; keep your systems healthy. That it is for a purpose. Just like your ballet classes prepare you for dancing, hatha yoga prepares you to follow (in my mind) a meditative, contemplative life. It’s a richness.⁸⁵

For Aviva Geismar, the attraction to the world of dance was twofold. On the one hand, there was something deeply compelling about moving through space, and exploring dynamics and tone. Geismar appreciated the challenges of overcoming physical limitations and learning to defy gravity through the hard earned skill of jumping. She is also an example of a dancer who was drawn into the field in an effort to feel more grounded. Due to a physically and emotionally restrictive environment she experienced in her family of origin, Geismar found dance a venue for personal expression as well as a vehicle to acquire an enhanced sense of connection to reality and grounded-ness.

Well, my mother has a very repressed physical life, is disconnected from her body. My house was very repressed, emotionally. I found a way to express myself emotionally and connect to my body {through dance}. It was powerful and meaningful, it encompassed rituals, was grounding, stabilizing. I loved to perform.⁸⁶

Canadian dancer/choreographer/teacher Peggy Baker articulated that it was a journey for her to find a medium, or means of expression that matched her physical and

⁸⁵ Sara Rudner

⁸⁶ Aviva Geismar

expressive preferences and abilities. Learning to decipher what it is that compels us to move can help reveal that wellspring of creativity that is unique to each individual dancer. Peggy Baker was initially attracted to the expressive component, the ritual nature, and simplicity of yoga, similar to her dance. Baker divined the heart of her instinct to move in order to realize how to capitalize her potential:

The physical poetry, sense of expression and connection... I always found it deeply expressive, a form in which I could express myself.⁸⁷

Like so many others, she relished in the physical freedom, and sought to bring each choreographer's aesthetic to life.

Working with different people, I discovered different areas in my dancing. The use of arms might be difficult, or foot work hard on the lower leg. Depending on the choreographers - some of that is technique and some of it is sensibility - being more in your natural grain, or is it a struggle to capture the aesthetic? Figuring out how to apply your physical ability to someone's aesthetic world.⁸⁸

Geismar was also attracted to yoga for the possibilities of growth and change. She found that the therapeutic aspects of Iyengar were particularly helpful for healing from old injuries as well as enhancing alignment, mobility and strength. Geismar now uses yoga to balance both the physical and spiritual asymmetries that can go hand in hand with a career in movement and performance.

Yoga changed my alignment, mobility, my strength...at forty-one I have a lot of old injuries, asymmetry that will be my natural pattern. My choreography tends to be imbalanced, so I use yoga to find balance. The spiritual side - focus, thinking about balance and energetic balance, like my rajassic nature - was also meaningful at that time in life {while recovering from an injury}. {yoga helped} balance the {my} innate over-working obsessive nature.⁸⁹

Indeed, this relationship of discipline to overwork or obsession cannot be underestimated.

⁸⁷ Peggy Baker

⁸⁸ Peggy Baker

⁸⁹ Aviva Geismar

Rhythm and soul:

For late bloomers the entry into the world of dance was frequently through another discipline such as music, theatre or art, or a competitive sport such as skating or gymnastics. Cathy Young is an example of an athlete, a serious gymnast, who took an African dance class that altered her whole view of the world and consequently what she wanted to do. This experience quickly led to an audition for musical theatre, where she was cast without training. She began studying dance as a junior in college; formal dance training came later in response to a knee injury that she suffered from gymnastics. Prior to the ballet classes she learned through imitation, she was a good mover who could pick up quickly. When asked what it was that attracted Young to dance, she described a deeply soulful and passionate connection and response to the African rhythms, the sensuality and community that existed in that form.

The sense I had of being fully alive, that this was a heightened experience, a moment, passionate, engaged with self, a way of living that I had not experienced...I wanted to live like that. There was something specific about the African rhythms, the soulfulness, passion, and power. I was not traditionally drawn to intellectual dance, my roots are in jazz, funk, African - deeply soulful. The sense of community, rhythm, sensuality, passion and expressiveness, the life force that existed in those dance forms.⁹⁰

The physical challenge was one of the reasons that drew Young into yoga at the peak of her performing career with Danny Buraczeski. Although she felt she could do anything physically, she was intrigued by how challenging the yoga class was for her; and the fact that she was unable to perform about two thirds of the class. She realized that her body was not balanced, and there was specific information available in this context that had been previously missing in her dance training. Aside from the physical

⁹⁰ Cathy Young

challenges, however, was the deep focus on awareness, the quieting nature, and non-competitive environment that felt spiritually satisfying.

It was the spiritual aspect, the intrigue and gratification of the physical challenge, the awareness that there were a lot of {unexplored} places in my body – my first teachers were Iyengar, who offered this great, specific information that I hadn't had as a dancer. And it was spiritual, at first I didn't perceive the complexity, but the non-competitiveness, the opening spiritually and physically was quieting, it was very powerful for me.⁹¹

Nancy Bannon was also a latecomer to dance, first entering the Juilliard School of Dance on probation. Bannon said it was her early athletic relationship to music and rhythm that flipped a switch for her; it was super stimulating, and she quickly progressed through all the levels. Attributing her musical instincts to her father's musicianship, Bannon described that it was initially the grand allegro, sheer physicality, and dramatic intent that attracted her to dance, that, and her tendency to overachieve.

I was an overachiever as a kid. It {dance} was so excitingly tangible you either fell or stood on your leg. At Juilliard I started on probation, but quickly moved through the levels. It changed my life, the dramatic movement: graham ... {dance} unlocked the door, it was a formative time, I was at an impressionable age...I remember feeling humiliated, and exhilarated, and thankful, and pressure. I wouldn't trade it. I wasn't happy, or social, but it was thrilling.⁹²

Bannon's last year of Juilliard she met up with Doug Varone, who asked her to be in his company. Prior to that she had been considering what it would be like to dance for Paul Taylor. This was a turning point for her, and a feeling of liberation from form and counts:

I decided to change my path - had thought about Taylor... - It {Varone} was very liberating. I didn't have to count. It was athletic, full of momentum, not archaic, energetic versus goal oriented. I joined his company {Doug Varone} and danced for 10 years, then I worked for Tere O'Connor for 3 years...

⁹¹ Cathy Young

⁹² Nancy Bannon

It wasn't until 1994 that Bannon discovered the physicality of yoga while wandering past teacher, dancer, and choreographer Susan Braham's yoga class after rehearsal during the Bates Dance Festival:

I wasn't able to take any classes, had had rehearsal all day, every day, and I wandered past a room. I knew of yoga as a form, had read books from the 70's on yoga... and I saw people jumping back to chaturanga, the brute physicality, the wildness and abandon of Sue's class.⁹³

Bannon quickly dove head first into yoga, studying with Braham, Jivamukti, and Om yoga along the way, as well as a random teacher training program that fit into her schedule. Bannon describes how natural it was to apply that same appetite for the physical into this new form, and how continued practice and study led her deeper into the athletic side of yoga, the astanga form, as well as the philosophy.

I took easily to daily practice...I did it without much reflection. The tapas aspect - was very easy - every day. It felt great, there was no reason to question it, and I was inspired to begin reading, which led me into further study. Meditation followed...Five years later I was practicing astanga. I was emotional, weepy - about the universality about it. Jumping back fed that love of athletic. When I was at Jivamukti I could do these forms that were so wild and fun and silly and lovely. People would have bracelets - versus their hair hair-sprayed into a bun, like at Juilliard.⁹⁴

One area of mutual attraction that could be a potential area of caution has to do with the incredible drive, commitment to perfectionism, and work ethic. Nancy Bannon admits to having lost her sense of humor for a time. The intensity of her approach became overwhelming as will and determination clouded perspective, and she began to question her use of language and actions to a crippling degree. Having a child and stepping back from the intensity helped to reestablish a sense of balance in her approach to practice, and she can now celebrate the unique nature of her own path.

⁹³ Nancy Bannon

⁹⁴ Nancy Bannon

When I was practicing seven days a week I lost my sense of humor. I was riddled with compassion. I felt like I was hurting somebody else... after I had Jake {son} I was a little bit looser. I could have sarcasm, and eat a little. Now I'm back in the real world, although I was close to becoming a renunciate. There is no one path, it is so liberating.⁹⁵

She feels beyond that now, however, and able to celebrate the benefits of her practice: clarity, commitment, and peace.

{Yoga} inspired me, I felt curious, and perplexed, it awakened the study in me again. The devotional component at its core - I wasn't searching for, or in need...but I get comfort from that. The commitment, every day, consciousness, with intention... My practice gives me that kind of peace. I don't feel besot. My emotions are out of the way...I don't have a busy mind... I get peace from that. It gives me a break that I carry with me throughout the day.⁹⁶

Another example of a dancer who was attracted to athletic movement from a young age was Weena Pauly. At nine, Weena Pauly was also a competitive gymnast, studying jazz and ballet seriously. She eventually received a BFA from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro before moving to New York City.

I was always a really physical kid. ... I was the youngest of three, and therefore the typical third child entertainer. I loved dressing up, and would do performances; I would do shows for dinner parties.⁹⁷

She especially recalls the affection and attention that came out of dancing, an element that will prove to be an interesting revelation later in her career, and remembers always wanting to be really physically challenged. Ballet provided plenty of that, since it was a form that she struggled with due to her lack of flexibility, shorter and stockier build. Modern dance provided an avenue that encouraged the power and strength and gave her a vehicle to explore less traditional means of challenging gravity and perspective.

⁹⁵ Nancy Bannon

⁹⁶ Nancy Bannon

⁹⁷ Weena Pauly

I liked ...looking at movement in a different way, finding new ways to move my body, react to gravity. I was attracted to the atypical, anything upside down, and had a strong upper body. I liked floor work.⁹⁸

Pauly found that she was also drawn to the psychological exploration, and that she felt modern dance was a healthier option due to the shift of emphasis from being pretty and thin. She felt strongly that the ballet world would have destroyed her due to the issues surrounding her build. Instead, she relished in the different slant and more supportive environment:

I loved going through space, and loved balances. Jumping I was pretty good at; it *felt* good.⁹⁹

It was no accident that Weena Pauly found herself working for one of the most outrageously athletic and physically brutal dance companies, Streb Ringside, for three years. The thrill of incessantly challenging and defying physics in the quest for solving mathematical and physical riddles was also deeply and warmly supported by Streb, who is such a positive force in her own company that her dancers are compelled to follow her vision. Streb is:

such a supporter, so positive, her reinforcement increases as you push the limits. It's amazing to do much more than you thought: I am doing these amazing things that I had no idea I could do - so there is this drive to continue.¹⁰⁰

Many of Pauly's injuries were a result of the wear and tear from the atypical movement vocabulary of back and forward falls, hurtling into walls and bodies in order to defy and redefine the meaning of dance according to Elizabeth Streb. Pauly found that because Streb was such a supporter, and used positive reinforcement increasingly as you

⁹⁸ Weena Pauly

⁹⁹ Weena Pauly

¹⁰⁰ Weena Pauly

pushed the limits that she had to be mindful of injury. An example of a typical Streb exploration would be: How can you make a 90-degree angle flip around 3 times?

A lot of times her questions are completely impossible in terms of physics, but instead of denying the possibility of them, she always asks you to at least try, because there – of course you don't know, and there is something that may come out of it that is equally valid. But then you do get drawn in, you get excited, and then you want to support it {the idea}.¹⁰¹

The bottom line, however, is that the constant push to go beyond can also affect or test the level of safety, and for a dancer this has a direct impact on career longevity. The psychology can also get tricky, the desire to be pushed and prove yourself a potential tiger within.

The psychology starts to get complicated when you realize you want to be encouraged and accepted for not necessarily pushing the limits. That maybe where you are is something superb on its own, that it doesn't have to be sort of death defying acts. ...I think everyone who is drawn into that work has a little bit of their own desire to not only be pushed, but also to prove. There is a real urgency in needing to prove yourself, as a person.¹⁰²

I believe that this longing for approval and support from directors and co-workers can put a dancer at risk both physically for overuse injuries, and also emotionally by potentially creating a psychologically abusive dynamic. Not all of the companies that I worked with were a supportive; in fact there were times when the dancers were encouraged to compete against one another. I believe that this practice has negative ramifications for both the dancer and person that could be far reaching, personally and professionally.

¹⁰¹ Weena Pauly

¹⁰² Weena Pauly

Vision and Vessel:

For many dancers the deep drive and commitment for moving is also wed to the vision of the choreographer. This was certainly true for myself. On the one hand I loved performing underneath a giant undulating umbrella, creating a dance with shadows reflected on a scrim, using the body as a prop, the thrill of moving with another as one body in pieces such as *Passion* and *Tuu*, a duet I created with Tim Acito under the direction of Moses Pendleton. One must be deeply inspired with the work on some level, to put forth the amount of necessary effort to imbibe a new style and repertory, or tolerate the joint and muscular stresses that over time can become detrimental. If at some point the vision no longer provides enough interest or returns to outweigh a tricky company dynamic, burnout from the continuous touring, or the underlying risk of potential of injury, a dancer may benefit from changing directions.

Weena Pauly is now exploring a different avenue of modern dance, with the Brian Brooks Moving Company. She sited that although it could be seen as more traditional, there is still a dynamic use of floor, walls, partnering and jumps. Pauly can now immerse in this new dance vision and family. She describes Brook's work as being inspiring to her, clever and understated, accessible and human, profound and not pretentious comments on space and time.

But Pauly realized that there had always been a much greater draw to her than the desire to prove and even to receive applause. For her the dance world has been more about the rehearsals, camaraderie, and the feeling of coming home.

You want to be complimented and encouraged for where you are. I reanalyzed the dynamic once I left {Streb}. I was drawn into that work...was driven by a desire to prove myself and receive applause. It was curious to me, my relationship to dance. If I am really honest, the most fun and connected {that I

felt} is not in the performing; it is in the rehearsal. I loved to practice. The competition, getting judged was part of it. That's no longer what it was about, this other thing. I don't live for the applause. I do love performing, but I don't live for it, that's not why I dance.¹⁰³

Weena Pauly stated that her love for the physicality as well as the family-like environment have remained integral to her attraction to dance as well as her dance experience.

That was a huge part of my relationship to dance: that time with those people in that room where I was so completely accepted. It was the family dynamic, that closeness – it feels sort of home. And then based on movement, being in my body, a joyful experience.¹⁰⁴

Pauly was another of the many dancers that I interviewed who was first introduced to yoga through Susan Braham. What was enticing about this experience for Pauly was the spacious and safe environment, the opportunity for deep internal listening, quieting and gentle approach. The concept of approaching physicality with a softer, more compassionate approach was truly inviting, and offered a new way to move through life.

I heard about it {yoga}; she {Susan Braham} was teaching at a studio. I went, her teaching is so quiet and subtle and open, it creates an enormous amount of space. She is sparing with her words, and allows the experience to happen. This was so foreign to me. Inside I was going crazy – I had been taught to receive information, and there was this enormous amount of chatter with no one to direct this focus. There was something about the room, the way the light came in the window; it almost made me cry. I had this drive to explore it, something special. I equate that to her, not the postures or form, but the ritual, the delicate touches of teaching. I went off and on for awhile. It wasn't till I understood it, that I sought her out again. I didn't feel like I was in my body, it was so emotional. Then I realized that that was in my body too, a new way to relate to my experience of having a body, relating to the world through that.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Weena Pauly

¹⁰⁴ Weena Pauly

¹⁰⁵ Weena Pauly

The power and newfound strength revealed in yoga is elicited through the practice of remaining soft, pliable, and vulnerable, and can be shocking. Fortresses are so often built around our lives, our relationships, and our heart in an effort to “be strong”. Achieving and attaining strength is a quality sought by dancers. Yet the overall effect of this constant and driven state is an emotional hardness that can leave one feeling brittle and fragile, the hardened outer shell hard to penetrate, but also just a mirage. While foreign, the sweet practice of savasana and compassion is a tantalizing by-product that draws the newcomer back to yoga again and again.

Spirituality in Motion:

Regardless of the circumstances however, the unifying thread for all participants in my study on yoga and dance reflected the commonality of some type of deep attraction to movement that lasted beyond the initial introduction. Andra Corvino, who happens to be my career long teacher and friend, described the magnetism for this field as being “called for this profession”, noting that this attraction was not necessarily a guarantee for success or smooth sailing along the way, but simply a deep calling.

... I always felt that dancers were chosen, with everything - I think you have a calling. I think if you play the violin, it's because you're drawn to the violin. And you wind up dancing because you are drawn to it...it feels like it is a decision you make of your own, but I think there are greater forces at work...And yes, and I think there are people who are drawn to it who don't seem to have the aptitude for it. And that seems to be another interesting path. They seem to be doing it to have to work something else out. I think most dancers feel they don't have the aptitude for it! ...I don't think any dancer feels like: “Now I have it all under control!”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Andra Corvino

I believe that this ongoing process, this physical evolution, is deeply tied to the nature of this temporal profession. Many dancers are attracted to this repetitive aspect of the dance experience. Like a runner, there is affirmation in the doing, and it is possible to dance in order to feel more alive. In fact, many dancers do not feel like they are a dancer when they are not dancing, because when the curtain comes down, you become a body that is no longer in motion. You have your peak performance, then it's over, it's history, and you're back at the barre. In some ways that is part of the poetry of dance, and acquiring a taste for the ongoing nature of this journey and an appreciation of the repetition involved can transform this discipline from the mundane to the divine. It can be really exciting to not ever be “done”, to live in a state of blissful connected-ness to the beauty of process. Andra Corvino has found the aspect of spirituality in motion in both the discipline of dance and yoga:

I think that is what attracts people to yoga; it is a spirituality in motion. It is the same feeling of doing a beautiful double turn in attitude and how that feels – you just want to keep recreating it, and the same is true of going into a meditation – you transcend something, you want to keep doing that. It feels really, really good... That's our lot, to try to get all those moments connected that way.¹⁰⁷

These perspectives and reminders of the deep initial attraction and love affair with dance serve as fodder for my continued experience in this field as a dancer, teacher, and student of life for a number of reasons. Firstly, remembering that initial motivation can be a lifeline for a dancer who, like myself, has or will experience numerous tours, cities, hotels, over a period of weeks, months and sometimes years away from family, friends, and a stable home. This initial call to connect to others through movement can lose the underlying joyous origins, the sheen having dulled from rigorous tours, numerous one-

¹⁰⁷ Andra Corvino

night stands, and many frustrating travel days or unhealthy company dynamics. At times I recall feeling as though I were living the 1980's film entitled *Trains, Planes, and Automobiles*. There were nights that the show would end around 11 or 12 at night and you would have checked out of the hotel earlier that day and hopped on a bus to sit into the wee hours of the new morning as your bodies begin to chill and muscles tighten. You learn as a dancer that schedules are often an approximation, and that control over circumstances is merely an illusion. Casting may not be announced more than a few days prior to the next tour, you are on beck and call and seldom free for family reunions and special celebrations. It becomes necessary to track that initial attraction, and savor the fleeting moments of magic that can transcend the day-to-day grind with a packed house, silky performance and fabulous Italian meal.

This memory, or overall perspective, is not only extremely helpful in sustaining a career in dance, but also in connecting the experience of the finite in relation to the infinite. I see my students struggling to regain perspective and focus when the endless minutia of details given within the context of the dance class begins to interfere with whole body integration. Blandine Calais-Germain reminds the mover to recall the larger picture in order to balance the need for strengthening individual muscle groups, or re-patterning neuromuscular pathways; there must always be integration.

Movement coordination implies an increase not of the quantitative strength of a muscle, but of its involvement in successive movements that make up complex actions. We can increase strength in the finger muscles by squeezing a rubber ball. However, this will be of little help in learning how to play the piano or type on a computer keyboard. Learning to coordinate finger movements in these complex exercises will require a different type of exercise.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Blandine Calais-Germain, *Anatomy of Movement Exercises, rev. ed.* (Seattle: Eastland Press, 1992), 5.

There are a multitude of examples as to how a dancer can become bogged down or offset by an imbalance of incoming detailed information in relation to the whole picture. For example, the student/teacher interplay is one area that can either gently guide a dancer's journey or drive personal (or teacher) expectations to the moon, and will be discussed at greater length in Chapter five: *The challenges and needs of a dancer*.

In his book *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*, Deepak Chopra encourages us to pick a vision of ourselves that is supported by the ever-renewing intelligence that is all around us. He suggests that keeping an open mind can alter our bodily experience, and that deep listening is the key to both hearing and sustaining this powerful intelligence, and finding a wellspring of possibility.

I want you to experience just how fluid and effortless existence can be when your worldview shifts. Despite its solid physical appearance, your body is very much like a river... Your body is the river of life that sustains you, yet it does so humbly, without asking for recognition. If you sit and listen to it, you will find that a powerful intelligence dwells in and with you. It isn't an intelligence of words, but compared to the millions of years of wisdom woven into one cell, the knowledge of words doesn't seem so grand.¹⁰⁹

Regardless as to whether the attraction to dance lies in a deep family tradition, the inherent desire to move, a rite of passage, a deep kinetic expression, or a means to communicate that which is beyond words, it is vital to transform the accompanying self-examination and levels of deep and personal exposure into a positive outlook. Chopra reminds us to examine how we view ourselves in space and time; that our perspective has a powerful impact upon our reality, and therefore the journey itself.

¹⁰⁹ Deepak Chopra, M.D. *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind: The Quantum Alternative to Growing Old* (New York: Harmony Books, 1993), 38.

CHAPTER V

THE DANCER PRACTICES YOGA

The Challenges and needs of a dancer:

Effects of age

In order to better understand the typical challenges facing a dancer, let us examine several aspects of the dancer's life. The areas that I intend to focus on are the starting age of the dancer, student teacher dynamic, hierarchy of the classroom, cultural idioms, aesthetic, attire and resulting personal and body image, financial backdrop, stress and injury. The dancer's life, influences, and needs are multifaceted and varied, and they underscore the extraordinary willpower and determination, characteristics of the professional dancer, as well as the importance of a healthy student/teacher relationship, inner balance and support systems.

Firstly, most – but not all - girls start early. Any deviation from this norm immediately sets up the feeling of playing catch up, a resultant feeling of inadequacy, and an underlying urgency, and feeling that “it is never enough”. These thoughts as an underlying mantra will bring about an imbalance of “doing” over “being”. A dancer of any age has typically developed a deep commitment and discipline, but often there is an equally compelling motivation that stems from the student/teacher relationship. The desire to please the teacher can be both initial motivator and potential detriment.

Student teacher relationship

This desire to please the teacher was one area that surfaced multiple times within the context of my research, indicating the powerful dynamic and potential for injury when a student is willing to place greater trust in the “teacher without” than the “teacher within”. A study designed by Bloom (1985) showed that dancers progress through a series of three stages during their artistic development: the initial stage, when one is lured into the thrill of the experience, the stage of commitment, where sacrifices are made to develop skills and deep bonding occurs with a mentor, and third, the stage of perfecting by means of “obsessive” responsibility. This latter stage is typically comprised of a mentoring relationship that is either based on fear or respect. Jacques Van Rossum revisited the Bloom study in 2001, finding that the significance of the student/teacher relationship ranked significantly higher in comparison to alternative significant others. When asked: “Who were the most important persons in your dance career?” dancers ranked friends at 37.2%, parents at 52.7%, and dance teachers at the all-time high of 78.3%. (More than one choice was allowed).¹¹⁰

Whereas this teacher/student dynamic may have worked very well for the young dancer, it has limited returns if this ultimately suppresses the instinct to notice, for example, if one is moving more deeply into a pose than is productive. It is quite typical for a child to seek the approval from a dance teacher, and subsequently gain positive reinforcement for the successes demonstrated within the context of the class. This area appears to be vast enough for a study onto itself, as more than one

¹¹⁰ Van Rossum, Jacques, H.A. *Talented in Dance: the Bloom Stage Model revisited in the personal histories of dance students* (High Ability Studies 2001) vol. 12, no. 2: 181-187.

practitioner/dancer/teacher was able to observe him or herself seeking approval within the context of a yoga class, reflecting this deep patterning. Thus, the yoga class was providing an opportunity to bring awareness to this characteristic, consequently leading to a choice as to whether or not the motivation to please the teacher was useful at that particular moment in time.

Susan Braham is an example of someone who was able to recall a time in which she was injured in a yoga class, due to her external focus and motivation to please the teacher:

One time comes to mind when I was unconsciously trying to impress {the} teacher. The teacher set up a dynamic that took me out of myself. The injury was to the low back in bow {pose} – {I performed the backbend with} too much {extension in the} lumbar spine¹¹¹

Weena Pauly is another example of a dancer who received a similar perspective through her yoga work:

I have more confidence in my own practice, and care less about what the teacher thinks. I trust myself more¹¹²

Nancy Bannon also recalls the conflict of wanting to be led by the teacher, and how empowering it was to step back and listen to her own instincts at a time when she was deeply enthralled with her teachers.

When I was doing astanga, I thought I would be a person that would alternate sides. My body is pretty symmetrical. The class was doing repeated padmasana, on the same knee. I started to feel a twinge. The teacher's suggestion was to keep doing it, "it will pass." I was falling in love with my teachers, so inspired. I was walking out of class on air. ...But I {remembered} the teacher is within you. {I asked myself} "Am I going to take care of myself?" I did stop. It was not even remotely radical. But it did tell me that – it made me look at the Guru system, it led to a larger concept: I am carrying the truth within me, if I can just

¹¹¹ Susan Braham

¹¹² Weena Pauly

get out of the way. I felt so rewarded; having the confidence to step back, back off.¹¹³

Methodology: the cost of discipleship

Compounding the student/teacher dynamic is also an underlying system of hierarchy that typically discourages dialogue within the context of the class. If this tendency to please extends into a dancer following leadership without question, this can lead to repression, or shutting down of self-referral. This lack of self-referral affects the dancer's ability to assess whether or not their body is able to support what is happening in that moment, and thereby increases susceptibility to injury as well as inhibits the dancer's ability to imbibe deeper understanding and development. This scenario sets up a barrier for growth in the dancer that can be even further exasperated when there is an added psychological or cultural dynamic of submission or lack of self-trust.

There is shocking evidence as to how our pedagogical systems have embraced and enabled ridicule and belittlement as acceptable forms of teaching. Far too many dancers have testified to the fact that at least part of their learning experience was based on a method that reflects the authoritarian and hierarchical roots of the evolution of dance from court to stage.¹¹⁴ As in the court, the ruler (or teacher/choreographer) was not to be disputed by the lowly subjects, who clearly could not know as much as their leader (recall Louis XIV: no dancer could surpass his expertise until he retired from the stage). Martha Graham demonstrates the characteristic of a demagogue:

You don't know how you are doing. Only I know how you are doing. You don't know how you are doing.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Nancy Bannon

¹¹⁴ Robin Lakes, "The Messages behind the Methods...3-18.

¹¹⁵ Martha Graham, quoted by Robin Lakes, "The Messages behind the Methods...10.

In this instance, Graham is likened to a guru; she is omniscient. Consider her piercing “instruction” to Paul Taylor:

Paul, what are you doing? I said get off {the stage}. You have plenty of opportunities to learn the back fall on one. Even beginners know the back fall on one. Do you expect me, me, to give you special coaching on the back fall on one? On no, sweetie pie, you are a big boy now. I am not your mother!¹¹⁶

Notice the information carried within these words has very little to do with dancing, but says worlds about the respective roles of student and teacher. The student of dance has too often been infantilized, diminished, and left to learn to dance through imitation. This “method”, or lack thereof, is often further camouflaged by militaristic slogans such as “Do as I do and do it NOW”, again without offering the student understanding as to how this can be accomplished.¹¹⁷ (One can see the relief and insight the studies of kinesiology and somatic disciplines have brought to the dance world).

According to Lakes, there are troves of material explaining to a dancer how to survive in these circumstances, but unfortunately, not overcome. Most advice merely facilitates an underlying compliancy, by instructing a dancer how to maneuver within the system as opposed to alter these deeply engrained traditions. Daniel Nagrin suggests that you either have to toughen up, or find an alternative situation:

Some of the best learning is being taught by some of the worst, nastiest people in the world. Some people weather it and some people don't... If you are being brutalized and you can't stand it and you can't learn, go someplace else...¹¹⁸

The problem is multifaceted, because not only does the student often infuse the negative feedback as part of their self-conception and image, but also these methodologies are inadvertently perpetuated by the next generation of teachers due to

¹¹⁶ Martha Graham, quoted by Robin Lakes, “The Messages behind the Methods...5.

¹¹⁷ Robin Lakes, “The Messages behind the Methods... 3-19.

¹¹⁸ Daniel Nagrin, quoted by Robin Lakes, “The Messages behind the Methods...3-19.

either lack of reflection, or by modeling one's teaching based on the trauma experienced in the traditional system of tyrannical teaching. Paul Taylor is later quoted in this same article as having hit, slapped, threatened, and even bit dancers in an effort to get the desired results from his dancers:

I usually don't yell, but I can become terribly threatening. I've actually hit dancers. I've bitten little fingers that stuck out too much. I've slapped wrists. I've threatened to throw people out of the window. People don't usually learn unless there's a little pain involved.¹¹⁹

As seen, many modern dancers (such as Martha Graham and Paul Taylor) who were known for their humanistic subject matter and desire to rebel against the Old School traditions, have inadvertently passed down the methodology they sought to alter due to ignorance, arrogance, what is considered acceptable, or allegiance to one's own dance lineage.¹²⁰

I now realize how instrumental my own teachers have been in my constantly evolving teaching style, both by modeling what worked for me, and pointedly leaving out what did not. Due to this research however, I am equally aware as to how I have unwittingly participated in the perpetuation of negative methodologies by assuming that my lack of success in such situations was due to a lack of talent (as I and others had been told), as opposed to a lack of insight and ability to explain on the part of the teacher. Although my negative experiences were frequently in ballet, I realize that modern dance is not nearly as exempt from the tyrannical tendencies, as I once believed. I can distinctly recall similar stories of colleagues (including myself) who were told in various modalities: "you will never be a dancer", "my mother dances better than you do", "you

¹¹⁹ Paul Taylor, quoted by Robin Lakes "The Messages behind the Methods ...

¹²⁰ Paul Taylor, quoted by Robin Lakes "The Messages behind the Methods...

look like chicken shit”, or “you have foot like one spoon”. Although my colleagues and I laughed together between classes over these anecdotes, I distinctly recall leaving the studio in tears on a number of occasions; in fact the wounds of ridicule, authoritarian teaching, and resulting low self-esteem have taken me decades to heal.

Many of my dancers with a strong balletic background take years to rediscover their own voice and value, if, indeed, they ever do. However, the dancer’s voice is important in a class based on somatic and structural awareness. It can take a great deal of reassurance from the teacher, as well as courage on the part of the dancer to reverse this deeply learned pattern, in order to explore to a greater degree their personal physical experience by verbally articulating when something hurts or is not understood within the classroom context.

I am confident that the standards of pedagogy in modern dance are changing for the better. I believe that bringing these issues to the forefront of our educational systems will invite further analysis of motivating forces, hidden agenda, and points of view that will, in turn, lead to revision of accepted methodologies. I am deeply grateful for my experience of working with teachers who had very different value and teaching systems founded in a genuine interest in the growth of their students. This is yet another aspect where yoga and other somatic disciplines have both facilitated healing as well as contributed to the formulation of my teaching style. I now realize that my strength as a teacher lies less in the material given, but rather in the manner in which it is taught. I have been strongly impacted by the book *Nonviolent Communication*, by Marshall B. Rosenberg, as well as those growing number of teachers who remain committed to

connection and have taken a great interest in the practices of skillful observation, compassion, and process oriented methods.

Men and dance:

As opposed to the large number of girls who generally tend to start at a young age, boys are often latecomers to the career. No doubt this alone creates a very different environment for the male dancer. It is interesting to note that not only did the male interviewees comprise a mere 12% of my study, but also, all five men interviewed started late.

Former Pilobolus dancer John M. Kent (Matt) was first drawn to martial arts, music, and art. He attended his first dance concert as a senior in high school and performed in his first dance performance (without training) as a sophomore in college. Kent's decision to do so surprised everyone, as it was a result of meeting his friend's dance professor, who spoke of her profession in the same manner as Kent spoke about martial arts. Ultimately, Kent felt that dance fulfilled an important aspect in his life, however due to his late entry and divided interests, Kent always felt like he was on the fringe of both music and dance. Fortunately, the late start didn't interfere with his ability to work for a major company. Kent recognizes that he is one of the lucky:

I felt that it {dance} communicated what words couldn't get. I didn't get that kind of interplay with audience as a music therapy major. I didn't have that feedback with my music. As a dancer, I have an individual voice. {Of} course that is because I worked for Pilobolus. I would never have auditioned for another company. I got lucky.¹²¹

¹²¹ John M. Kent

Kent described his lack of training as both a strength and weakness, and relished his ability to look at the whole picture due to his eclectic background.

I have no rooting in traditional vocabulary. It's the best of me, and the worst – they, Pilobolus, wanted that. {It's just like what} Ernestine Stodelle said: “if you're looking for a style that is antagonistic to innate movement, you'll never find it.” I really like that {Pilobolus} style – and {it worked well because} I have a really good work ethic. I have the sense of the whole picture – theatre, physics, technique - this comes from martial arts – I know the feeling, how it looks, and translates.¹²²

Joseph Mills, former dancer of Erick Hawkins and Momix, was also introduced into the world of dance through other media. His early focus was on gymnastics and art; he did not take his first dance class until college. It was a crush on a girl that led Mills to the studio where he then fell heels-over-head with the art form, the performance aspect, as well as the discovery that movement was how he learned.

I liked the physicality of it, the artistic component. My undergrad was in arts, {I loved} physicality and art making, making art with my body... I had a preoccupation with the body, my body. There was something performative, too - being seen, that was important to me...I really miss that. I needed that. ... I think that I had an affinity to understanding my body intuitively, and ...it laid a more concrete framework for ...validating the experience of movement as being the most important thing {in my life}, because that is how I learned.¹²³

Christopher Caines was also deeply interested in movement. His experiences and interests in sports and fencing lay in the form and style versus the competitive or aggressive nature, he was known for having the “prettiest form”. In the fourth grade Caines actually had a gym teacher that utilized a very eccentric combination of laban movement analysis/modern dance/improvisation, performed in low lights to such music as Johnny Cash's *Trailer for Sale or Rent*. In the fifth grade, Caines' class constructed masks in art class for an improvisation, and he was singled out as the best in the class.

¹²² John M. Kent

¹²³ Joseph Mills

This sentiment was unanimous, that is until sixth grade, when peer pressure began to curtail his classmate's encouragement:

Everyone, but everyone, agreed that I was the "best" in my class, in the sense that I was the most spontaneous, imaginative, and uninhibited. I think, even more than the girls. This was fine until grade six, at which point some of the other boys, who were becoming too cool to do such things, started teasing me a little.¹²⁴

Caines cannot recall consciously avoiding dance classes, although one of his friends took ballet, and he actively sought out the performances that came to Halifax, where he lived:

I went to see all the dance I possibly could in high school – the big Canadian companies on tour, and the little local groups, who were not that good, really, though well meaning. But somehow the idea of taking actual dance classes – which were available in Halifax – didn't occur to me. I'm not sure if I felt that my family and/or friends would disapprove, or what it was. Whatever it was, it was unconscious.¹²⁵

Driven academically, Caines entered Harvard University, as a Celtic Languages scholar. It was not long however, before Caines opted to throw all caution to the wind, forego the nomination for a Mellon fellowship, and dive headlong into his fated career. Not that this was an easy decision. It was agonizing, due to his lack of experience and encouragement from his parents:

{It} was a struggle that preoccupied my last two years at school. I really agonized over the decision, wondering if I could ever be good enough – good enough to work, and, above all, as good as I wanted to be. (I am always my harshest critic). My parents were very hostile to the idea (they eventually came around, about ten years later), thinking, quite sensibly, that I was wasting a very expensive education. It was a real struggle.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Christopher Caines

¹²⁵ Christopher Caines

¹²⁶ Christopher Caines

In many ways Caines had a wonderful facility for dance. He described that he had a resilient, lean, and limber body that supported his career choice, although his late start in dance did render his drive for perfection even more aggressive:

Actually, as modern dancers go, my feet are pretty enough, and very resilient, and my turnout is ample and sufficient; it's just that, starting late, I couldn't develop it the way dancers trained in ballet from childhood do, and I always wanted more. Particularly when I was a young dancer, I really was so perfectionist and self-critical - occupational hazard – that I was really hard on myself about it.¹²⁷

That drive and perfectionism continue to surface throughout the course of this research is not surprising, indeed it is a key personality trait, motivating factor, and psychological component of most dancers. Whatever limitations Caines may have experienced however, these were not enough to impede or limit his dancing. Having worked with 24 different choreographers, not to mention his own work, he has enjoyed a very fruitful career filled with enormous variety. His only regret is that he didn't start out earlier, and perhaps had a company position as a dancer that potentially would have provided fiscal stability, health benefits, and artistic satisfaction:

I have often fantasized about a different life: If I had grown up in a different city, or had stage-door-type parents, or if there had been some other factor that would have got me into ballet classes as a kid, I might have gone on to study at, say, the National Ballet School or Royal Winnipeg school, and maybe had a career as a ballet dancer in Canada, which would have been a vastly easier launching pad for my work as a choreographer – which is my real destiny – than the episodic, New York Downtown post-modern journeyman dancer life – and its incredible poverty – that I did have. But then, maybe I would have quit dancing as a teenager to concentrate on my schoolwork, as many kids do. And I've been told that the life of dancers in big ballet companies is very brutal, and I might not have liked it. Still there is no substitute for early training, and I have always longed for it, and always envied people who get to perform as often as dancers in big companies do. Your life is your life. No going back. Forward only.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Christopher Caines

¹²⁸ Christopher Caines

Daryl Fowkes was discouraged from continuing his early training due to a lack of emotional and financial support from his family of origin. At age seven, Fowkes was interested enough in his dance training to check out library books on dance despite the teasing that he received for his curiosity and enthusiasm. He was instead encouraged to pursue a career in music, which Fowkes actively did until he was on scholarship at Interlochen for music, and fate brought him back into the world of dance as an extra in *The Nutcracker*.¹²⁹

Fowkes states that these early impressions have been carried far into his career, that most of his injuries have been emotional instead of physical:

Most issues have been emotional, mental. I take good care of {my} body, but there has been this extreme angst, the stigma of being male, gay, starting late, and too old at 17!!¹³⁰

It is possible that the reduced number of men in this study is at least in part reflective of social stigma, the perceived unmanliness of the dance profession and concomitantly presumed homosexuality of male dancers. The work of John Jordan, professor at California State University at Fresno, illuminates a great deal on what male dancers are faced with during the course of their career. Whereas many proclaim that the dance derived from the courts was originally empowering, a weapon of state, there remains evidence of anxiety produced by the viewpoint that dance is not appropriate for the male. Jordan's premise is that this phenomenon is not limited to the 20th Century, but rather has contradictory roots that are revealed in such circumstances as the plays *The English Monsieur* and *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* (1672). In both instances, foolish characters are developed such as Monsieur Parris and Frenchlove, who have taken on

¹²⁹ Daryl Fowkes

¹³⁰ Daryl Fowkes

French characteristics, and are mocked through the subjects of dance, gender, and nationality. That this dates back to the mid 1600's, suggests that the celebrated lineage of princes is also peppered with humor references such as the character of Sir Fopling Flutter (1976), who epitomized English humor of the French and their affectations.¹³¹ It is imperative to note how profoundly social stigma can impact an individual, their career choices, as well as peer and self-perception and acceptance.

Pressure and perception: cultural ideals and body image

Despite the wide variety of pathways into this field (natural attraction, familial introduction, some type of athletics, art, gymnastics, martial arts, acting, or collegiate experience, etc.) dancers share one thing in common. It is often a short career. Career transition is near inevitable and, although there are always exceptions, there *will* be physical modifications/evolutions for those who linger in this field. Consider the progressive content and directional changes in the works and physicality of such artists as Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham, or Anna Halprin. A combination of evolving interests, varying career demands, and/or changes in body due to wear and tear and/or aging inevitably affect the course of an individual's career. Certainly virtuosic athleticism will be altered over time, and therefore the career of a dancer is often condensed, driven, and intense.

Add to this intensity the necessity for doing well under pressure. A dancer must learn to be proficient in the classroom as well as successful under pressure in both

¹³¹ John Bryce Jordan, "Is He No Man' Toward an Appreciation of Male Effeminacy in English Dance History," *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, vol. 30, edited by Timothy Erwin and Ourinda Mostefai. Baltimore: (John Hopkins UP, 2001) : 201-222.

audition and performance situations. Because the person and the product are one and the same, it is easy to take the audition and rejection personally. The underlying scrutiny can become so prominent in an individual that I have seen it lead to self-destructive tendencies and self-perceptions.

I have watched dancers, dear friends, battle with anorexia and bulimia and am well aware of the destructive tendencies that stem from low self-images. Often contributing to a low self-image is the typical attire worn in the classroom. Price and Pettijohn conducted a study at Mercyhurst College to determine whether or not the tight-fitted dance attire required by many dance schools and studios affected a dancer's self-perception. Although the study admits limitations, there were implications that there was a relationship between performance, negative body image, and tight fitted clothing. The study utilized a survey comprised of ten statements ranging from "I like my body", "I enjoy looking at myself in the mirror during class", "I am a good dancer", to muscular and weight assessment. Whereas it is interesting to note that on a scale of 1 - 5 (5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree) none of the participants exceeded a high 3 (neutral answer) on any personal assessment, reflecting the kind of driven perfectionism typical of this medium. Additionally, *all* answers reflected markedly lower self-esteem in relation to classes taken in tight fitting attire versus the dancer's choice of "junk", or casual attire.¹³²

The accepted dance (and in particular, ballet) aesthetic is also largely influential to a dancer. The recent trend, due in part to the influence of the "father of American

¹³² Brena Price, Terry F. Pettijohn II, "The Effect of Ballet Dance Attire on Body and Self-Perceptions of Female Dancers" *Social Behavior and Personality* (2006) vol. 34, no. 8: 991-997.

Ballet”, George Balanchine, and his preference for rail thin “baby ballerinas”, correlates with the escalating concern of form over function. But since dancing is an art form that relies upon physicality, aesthetic, and artistry, the dancer can face serious implications if he or she does not take in sufficient caloric intake in order to sustain muscle and bone growth and health. Female dance students and professional ballerinas have been reported to consume below 70% and 80% of the recommended daily allowance needed to equivocate the necessary energy production, thus offsetting the ‘triad’ of disordered eating. Due to this imbalance, amenorrhea (affecting the normal menstrual cycle) and osteoporosis are seen as equally common.¹³³

Dr. Michelle Warren stated that up to 30% of female dancers experience primary or secondary amenorrhea due to a combination of reduced caloric intake, stress, and/or over-exercising.¹³⁴ I have had students who were perfectly content to never have their period, unaware that this condition could negatively impact their career, as well as their overall health. Because the body borrows resources from one physiological system to support another in situations of exigency, areas like the reproductive system can be shut down under these circumstances. Bone density can also be affected (even with a high intake of calcium), interfering with bone growth and creating a greater susceptibility to stress fractures and osteoarthritis. A vegetarian diet can also compound this tendency, and Warren recommends strategizing with a nutritionist, as well as eating a varied diet rich in calcium, protein, and iron.¹³⁵

¹³³ Yiannis Koutedakis and Athanasios Jamurtas, “The Dancer as a Performing Athlete: Physiological Considerations” *Sports Medicine* (2004) : 651-661.

¹³⁴ Dr. Michelle Warren, interview by Holly Andren, “Problem: Missed Periods” *Dance Spirit*, vol. 9, no. 9 (November 2005) : 47-48.

¹³⁵ Dr. Michelle Warren, interview by Holly Andren, “Problem: Missed Periods...”

The media further exasperates an unrealistic and damaging body image due to the dual and contradictory emphasis it places on unending consumption of products including food and, on the other hand, consumptive thinness. Television and magazines give us a standard equally sleek to that of the dance world by which to measure our physical appearance and success and instructs us how to achieve it. In this manner, ideologies of youth, beauty, and thinness are transmitted, accepted, and internalized. Marika Tiggemann's study of the role of media exposure in adolescent girls' body dissatisfaction and drive for thinness found that the participants held the media at least partly responsible for their bodily dissatisfaction.¹³⁶

It is a sobering thought to fathom how many individuals have been adversely affected by this cultural ideal, and taken this dissatisfaction into the extreme, through various eating disorders. Regardless as to whether or not these impulses are acted upon however, there exists a cultural bar. Hennighausen, Enkelmann, Wewetzer, and Remschmidt found in their research concerning body image distortion in anorexia nervosa that of all participants, (including the control group, who were not diagnosed with anorexia nervosa) almost all desired a body shape that was significantly lower than that of their own body, and actually resembled a weight more typical of an individual with anorexia nervosa.¹³⁷

As dancers, we are regularly stripped to leotards and tights and surrounded by a room full of mirrors that show us every misstep, fault or perceived imperfection. Step

¹³⁶ Marika Tiggemann, "The Role of Media Exposure in Adolescent Girls' Body Dissatisfaction and Drive for Thinness: Prospective Results" *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, vol. 25, no. 5 (2006) : 523-541.

¹³⁷ Hennighausen, Enkelmann, Wewetzer, Remschmidt, "Body Image Distortion in Anorexia Nervosa – is There Really a Perceptual Deficit?" *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* (1999) : 200-206.

outside of the studio and our socio-cultural environment reflects the pervading beliefs of our time. We can learn to construct our own support system and become very comfortable with our bodies, amount or lack of training, or circumstances, or we can begin to harbor the belief that we are “not good enough” or “out of place”. Separating the expectations of others, guidance from the ideal - or from debilitating criticism - can be like climbing Mount Everest barefoot, for some.

Perception and performance:

Ultimately, the field of dance is also a business. Many dancers excel in one area or another, but without a little business savvy, there is little chance of overall survival. Firstly, there is a need to take care of the product you are “selling”, you! Secondly, there must be an ability to sell your product, again - you.

As discussed, many dancers and choreographers cherish this opportunity of expression citing that it is one of many reasons for pursuing this field. Expression is one of the foundations of modern dance itself; the revolt from the classical form had to do with excavating new content, enhancing the voice of the individual dancer. There are times when a dancer becomes so consumed with physical perfection that the body resembles a machine, beautifully technically proficient, but devoid of expression. Whereas this is an expansive field, with room for all kinds of movers, I know that my eye is drawn to the performer who is capable of connecting deeply to some kind of rich inner experience. True, there are those who share the vision of Merce Cunningham or George Balanchine, who have aspects of their work that are largely shaped by abstract movement and design, yet it is my belief that our eye is still drawn to a dancer who has a “ripeness”,

the ability to stay present to the moment and movement, an availability regardless of style.

Andra Corvino shared that what our eye is drawn to is a deep personal connectedness that enables the performer to be truly present, free to express deeply, within whatever form they are imbibing:

You realize that your best performances and the performances that you have enjoyed the most watching in other people are the performances that are so grounded and so centered that they don't care if anybody - or who - is watching. They're just really dancing, they're dancing from their place of connected-ness, and you just happen to be privileged enough to be able to see it. ¹³⁸

These dancers are not outside of themselves or contemplating the audience - regardless of the medium of performance:

They're not dancing for you - ...musical theatre sort of borders that too, but when it's done really well, they're in their character, and they are believing what they are doing. They are not counting the heads of the audience while they're singing the song - {thinking} "Oh why did you leave!!" "I'm not finished yet!!"¹³⁹

This can be incredibly freeing as a performer, and can be difficult to achieve when you are young, due to the level of scrutiny and practical situation of being constantly seen:

That freed me up a lot when I started to try to practice that. And I think getting older helped with that, because I don't really care! Are you starting to get to that place, too? When you're young it's so serious. Everything that you do is so scrutinized, and everything - the whole world hangs on it...And then when you're older you realize that if I fall on the street on my face, no one will even notice...they're just busy with their own lives...¹⁴⁰

Perception and performance are both relatively subjective areas - in fact the whole auditioning process is - you may or may not get the job because of your age, height, weight, look, personality, your ability or style, or even whom you know or don't

¹³⁸ Andra Corvino

¹³⁹ Andra Corvino

¹⁴⁰ Andra Corvino

know. I remember a friend of mine sharing that he would never get into the Taylor Company, because he had had an affair with one of the dancers that was in a committed relationship and this was considered an enormous faux pas and unacceptable in this particular company.

As a dancer, you must also be versatile. Although adaptability and multifarious capabilities are integral to the human experience, there is always someone (in this case another dancer) who can do it better, longer, higher, or with greater athleticism. In this day and age the bar for physical aptitude is extremely high. Classes will continue throughout the career, and rehearsals are likely to be physically demanding and often long and arduous: from nine to five. And sometimes there will be lulls between jobs, no performances, no work, and no pay. Most dancers I know have lived hand to mouth for the majority of their career, and many dance jobs simply don't pay enough to live on. Your company may have short seasons, and many dancers hop from one company to another to make the ends meet. According to Carolyn Brown, the early company of Merce Cunningham had one year with only two and a half performances. She spent the remaining time in rehearsals and in jobs that helped her make the rent.¹⁴¹ This not only equates to an enormous amount of devotion, but additional economic stress that must call upon a veritable wellspring of endurance and love of the art.

Life as a gypsy:

As previously discussed, the lifestyle of the dancer is of considerable importance when determining the challenges of a dancer. The type of intensity will vary from one

¹⁴¹ Merce Cunningham: *A Lifetime of Dance*, Digital Video Disc (2000).

company to another, but often consists of grueling tour or performance schedules that allow no room for family reunions, injuries, or perspective. This reality means that the dancer's support system is often remote, reinforcing the role of the company as surrogate family and affecting the dancer's susceptibility to the criticism and perceptions of their colleagues, and tolerance of destructive dynamics. Life on the road is transient: many days, weeks, months, and even years away from your home, family, and long term friends. Living out of hotels, your suitcase, and subletting apartments increases a dancer's dependency upon the company. Now there are cell phones and email to keep in contact, but in the past communication was expensive, and often sparse.

It can be difficult to comprehend how the eager new dancer can so swiftly become seasoned, but there are typically a series of disappointments and realizations that interfere with the exhilaration of being paid (or not) to travel around the world. Although you may travel to exotic lands, there are often times that work interferes with the chance to enjoy it. One of the National tours of *A Chorus Line* went to eighty-nine different cities with an average stop over of one week per city. Your day off, unless it was "golden", was often a travel day.¹⁴² A relatively consistent (and higher paying) job such as dancing on Broadway, entails eight shows a week with one day off – that is until the show closes, and you are back in the auditioning circuit again. Holidays often mean that you are performing in a special event connected with the occasion, and that you are not available for family gatherings. Recall the importance of maintaining perspective - if this is your scenario; you are one of the lucky!

¹⁴² Mark Santillano

Typically, there are the financial problems intrinsic to this, like many art forms. For instance, paychecks range in size, but are generally well under what is considered a viable income, and rarely suited for such luxuries as future planning. Moreover, unlike in Western Europe, our government does not support dance companies in the United States. Arts funding sources like the National Endowment of the Arts are indeed always in jeopardy, and art and music education are often the first to go from our schools (dance is not generally on the curriculum to begin with). Physicality itself has taken a lower priority within school systems. In a time when the nation is in a crisis over childhood obesity, schools are offering gym with far less frequency.¹⁴³ And overall contributions to the arts fluctuate.

Health, stress and injury:

In addition to these many challenges, there are the ongoing health issues that can range from wear and tear from repetitive motion (overuse of muscles), the need to work through or with injuries (in the film *The Company*, Neva performed with a broken rib), ramifications of misalignment or congenital/structural imbalances (torqued knees, broken sesamoid bone in foot, joint pain or instability, shin splints, sprained ankles...). Other common injuries can be due to hard floor surfaces or a raked stage as in European tours and shows like *Cats*, *Miss Saigon*. Additionally, if you don't take the time to rest, the injury won't really heal and is likely to become a chronic condition.

University of Washington psychology professor Ronald Smith stretched the correlation of stress and injury. He discovered that the injury rate in a ballet company

¹⁴³ Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 9.

was 61% over an eight-month period (resulting in the loss of an average of 10.5 days, and ranging from one to eighty-seven days). Interestingly, these figures were comparable to similar studies concerning contact sports such as wrestling and football. This same study included questions that revealed correlations between these same injuries and high levels of stress coupled with low social support. The study listed the physical manifestations of stress as including such symptoms as hyperventilation, muscular tension, sweating induced by anxiety, the feeling of “butterflies in the stomach”, and increased heart rate¹⁴⁴, all factors associated with the parasympathetic nervous system, and fight or flight response. The cognitive components of this same study included additional worrying and lack of focus that leads to higher susceptibility for injury.

Bearing the above - mentioned categorical realities of a dancer in mind, it is easy to see how vastly important a comprehensive support system is for the dancer. An effective support system affects levels of stress, positive outlook, and ability to change one’s negative behaviors and habits, and this can radically affect performance and health of an individual.¹⁴⁵

Firstly, one can consider the importance of good teachers and a foundational understanding of the body. Anatomist Irene Dowd explains how anatomy allows the dancer to step outside of their habitual limitations and preferences:

Anatomy doesn’t tell us what to do, but how we’re doing it. It is a way of describing what we’re doing in great detail. My original interest as a choreographer was to create ways of moving beyond what I knew. Anatomy allows me to step outside my own aesthetic preferences, to figure out how I could

¹⁴⁴ Ronald Smith, *Journal of Anxiety, Stress and Coping*, (Oct. 2000).

¹⁴⁵ A.H. Scott. *Wellness Works*; “Community Service Health Promotion Groups Led by Occupational Therapy Students” *The American Journal Of Occupational Therapy* 53, no. 6 (November 1999) : 570.

warm up with a balance of muscle action around my joints. That means I have to use all of my muscles equally.¹⁴⁶

Structural and functional understanding is fundamental to achieving balance of strength and flexibility, acquiring endurance and performance skills. This physical integration can contribute to an overall positive attitude and realistic expectations, and can aide in establishing a healthy balance of discipline and surrender. Remaining open and flexible in the mind is vital, since our goal as a dancer continues to evolve. Dowd's perception of the constant evolution of what is "right" reflects the influence of her mentor, Mabel

Todd:

"The mind is an instrument of thought, not a museum". We are constantly changing.¹⁴⁷

The challenges presented to a dancer throughout his or her life are manifold and extraordinary. It is my belief that the practice of yoga can be a helpful anchor and guide to dancers who will face a multitude of peaks and valleys that often include hardships such as poverty, rejection, self -destructive behavior, and injury. One must develop an enormous supply of tenacity in order to persevere. The underlying necessary characteristics to excel in this field are what I believe makes a dancer unique, special, and in a class of his or her own. I am amazed at the difference in my students who have a dance background from those that do not. The work ethic of dancers frequently far surpasses or equals those of my brightest academics. These same benefits, however, regardless of the chosen profession, also harbor the seeds of destruction and unhappiness. Without a healthy counterbalance to such basic survival skills as rigorous discipline, uncanny work ethic, perseverance, focus, and a kinetic connection to life, any of these

¹⁴⁶ Irene Dowd, Teacher's Wisdom *Dance Magazine* (June 2005) vol. 79, no. 6 : 76-77.

¹⁴⁷ Irene Dowd, quoting Mabel Todd, "Teacher's Wisdom" *Dance Magazine*...

“pros” can transform into an obsession and lead to overuse, injury, and stress. The tiger, feeding on your ambition, can leap out of the shadows and skin you alive. Creating balance in this aspect is one way in which yoga can be beneficial to the dancer, and although practicing restorative, pranayama, savasana, or meditation are likely choices, it can take a steady practice of the asanas to balance body, mind, and spirit in a methodical manner prior to the more advanced challenge of meeting and quieting the vrttis, or fluctuations, of the mind.

Risk and prevention:

Since the dancer must rely on the body for his or her livelihood, the corporeal involvement can be likened to the care of an exquisitely refined, tuned, and irreplaceable instrument. It is not surprising that the dancer is inclined to overdo, given the level of discipline that must be utilized in order to achieve mastery. Therefore, the dancer’s understanding of their structural and muscular limitations is vital. In many instances, I found within the context of my research that this was a learning process that took place over many years. Due to a variety of circumstances, dancers are considered to be at high risk for musculoskeletal disorders. The repetitive and consistent training, exasperated by muscular imbalance, all directly correlate to the high annual injury incidence in professional dancers: 67-95%, the majority being injuries to the lower extremities (57-75%). Overuse alone accounts for 60-76% of these injuries.¹⁴⁸

Bronner, Ojofeitimi, and Spriggs found both extrinsic (including type and duration of work) and intrinsic (age, gender, previous injury, fitness, psychology, and

¹⁴⁸ Shaw Bronner, Sheyi Ojofeitimi, and Jon Spriggs, “Occupational Musculoskeletal Disorders in Dancers” *Physical Therapy Reviews* (2003) vol. 8 : 57-68.

joint laxity) risk factors were important variables for consideration. For instance, some companies may incorporate movement that stresses the knees - contemplate the wear and tear of 20-50 knee squats in one day. Additionally, factor in the reality that muscles are at their greatest disadvantage when worked at the extremes, a well-known reality of dancers. Most significantly, however, is the reality that the rehearsal and performance schedule tends to be ongoing, allowing little to no room for recuperation:

Dancers maintain a year-round performance schedule requiring a constant “peak”.¹⁴⁹

There were areas within the dancer’s control. Knowing that there are high and continuous physical demands can help female dancers understand why eating the appropriate caloric intake can lower risk for injury. Dancers with low body mass index (BMI) were found to have spent more days suffering injuries than dancers with higher (BMI).¹⁵⁰ Additionally, since higher injuries also correlated with joint mobility, one can use preventive measures by utilizing physical therapy or other somatic disciplines that focus on strength and joint stability. The authors of the Bronner, Ojofeitimi, and Spriggs study unanimously agreed that dance training alone fell short of the cardiovascular needs of a dancer:

A recent study analyzed injury factors from dance injury reports and reported that fatigue factored as the most common variable cited by dancers. It appears that dance training alone is inadequate to prepare dancers for the aerobic demands of performance.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Shaw Bronner, Sheyi Ojofeitimi, and Jon Spriggs, “Occupational Musculoskeletal...”

¹⁵⁰ Shaw Bronner, Sheyi Ojofeitimi, and Jon Spriggs, “Occupational Musculoskeletal...”60.

¹⁵¹ Shaw Bronner, Sheyi Ojofeitimi, and Jon Spriggs, “Occupational Musculoskeletal...” 61-62.

Bearing these figures in mind, and the overall high-risk category that dancers fall in, one cannot emphasize enough the importance of a focus on structural awareness and function. Many dancers in the context of my research said that they had originally learned through imitation however, suggesting that little understanding of musculoskeletal functioning was the norm, at least in past decades. Additionally, it was common for a dancer to strive for the outer aesthetic goal such as increased turnout at the expense of misalignment and joint stress. Research conducted on the correlation of turnout and lower extremity injuries in classical ballet dancers discovered that the four most common nontraumatic injuries (in decreasing frequency) were anterior hip pain, shin splints/stress fractures, low back pain, posterior ankle pain (os trigonum, tendonitis, impingement), and the four most common traumatic injuries were to the lateral and posterior ankle and the anterior and posterior hip.¹⁵² On the whole, those who compensated their turnout had a higher rate of injuries, and 90% of those who compensated their turnout by 25 degrees or greater reported injuries. Therefore, findings within this study suggested that preventative measures should focus on hip stability rather than on flexibility:

Dancers need to be encouraged to achieve turnout positions that are realistic for each individual, based on their available ROM and alignment. Doing so would decrease the need for turnout compensation and the resultant chronic tissue overload.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Vicki Negus, PT, MSPT, Diana Hopper, PhD, N. Kathryn Briffa, PhD, “Associations Between Turnout and Lower Extremity Injuries in Classical Ballet Dancers” *Journal of Orthopedic & Sports Physical Therapy* (May 2005) vol. 35, no. 5: 312.

¹⁵³ Vicki Negus, PT, MSPT, Diana Hopper, PhD, N. Kathryn Briffa, PhD, “Associations Between...318.

Learning discernment between what can be changed, and what cannot, what is a structural limitation, and what is muscular imbalance is an important foundational tool for all dancers, and cannot be underestimated.

The integral role of body type:

As a point of reference, I have incorporated a brief explanation of both Western and Indian systems of thought concerning body types. I use the western system as a model of comparison, since it has not only played a greater role in my own pedagogy, but also forms the basis of various modern dance pedagogy traditions with which I am familiar. Although both systems are flawed, the western version will be most familiar to dancers and dance teachers and other readers. I believe this system has value to the dancer, teacher, and yogi, since it offers a means with which to discuss how body type affects the performance of yoga and dance. Additionally, the knowledge of body type can be used to greater assist physical growth and prowess. For example, as knowledge of my own body type has grown throughout my career, it has positively affected my ability to better counter my weaknesses, prevent and heal past injuries, as well as enhance my own successes. Indeed, I wish that I had been more familiar with such systems at an earlier point in my career.

I am deeply aware of the potential negative repercussions and social implications of utilizing any system for categorizing people, as my initial reaction to learning the multitude of weaknesses for which I was susceptible was that of defeat. However, I believe this negative reaction reflects my early desire for perfection, (a goal to which I can only fall short) and I can no longer overlook the potential for self-understanding

gleaned through the study of the western anthropometric somatotypes: ectomorph, endomorph, or mesomorph.

Each particular type will have tendencies and proclivities that reflect either dominance or weakness of a particular area, the knowledge and understanding of which can enlighten the dancer as to how best accommodate and support their own unique system. For example, the **Ectomorph**, long and lean, has proportionally a greater degree of nerve tissue (aiding in the ability to move in a quick and sudden manner) and fragile bone structure. Bone is typically less dense, but long, and excessive weight will be distributed in hips and thighs. This body type gravitates towards a less efficient musculature, is more ligamentous, can contain high levels of neuromuscular tension, tends to have an inefficient digestive system, and is known for being able to eat large quantities without weight gain. Additionally, the Ectomorph has low blood pressure, and poor circulation that can lead to poor endurance. Understanding these factors can lead to a greater effectiveness in training, since one can better target training to encompass greater balance by emphasizing the following areas: strength, cardiovascular fitness, and relaxation in order to balance the natural propensity toward flexibility.¹⁵⁴

On the other hand, the **mesomorph** tends to have a dominance of muscle and connective tissue, as well as endocrine tissue. This body type also has distinctive physical traits such as broad shoulders, is athletic in appearance, muscular, has a strong cardiovascular system and musculature that corresponds to physical fitness, and also has a greater capacity for relaxation and digestion than the Ectomorph, and low blood pressure. As long as this body type remains fit, all systems should function at an

¹⁵⁴ Sally Sevey Fit, *Dance Kinesiology*, 2d. ed., (Schirmer Books, 1996), 281-286.

optimum. Generally, the mesomorph can enjoy large, gross motor activities, but struggles with flexibility and extreme tempos, either fast or slow.¹⁵⁵

Lastly, the **endomorph** tends to have a more even distribution of weight, has cardiovascular and musculature that falls between that of the mesomorph and Ectomorph, and has a propensity for strength, flexibility, and endurance, leading to a marked aptitude for strength and endurance with minimal training. The endomorph has an excellent ability to relax, but is challenged with rapid movement and is quick to gain weight, particularly when sedentary.¹⁵⁶

I think it is interesting to note that the three body types: ectomorph, endomorph, and mesomorph, correlate to Ayurveda physical categories. Ayurveda is an Indian theory and practice of medicine popular in India and among yoga practitioners in the West. An ectomorph would be considered a person with high Vata (associated with air and space, difficult to quiet the mind, come down to earth). This body type is balanced by yoga asanas that will induce a combination of enhanced circulation, lung capacity, strength, endurance, and relaxation.

Pitta (associated with fire and water, being hot blooded, and rajassic in temperament) is likened to mesomorph. The Pitta practitioner can balance needs with a middle of the road approach, avoiding asanas that bring out the extremes such as super hot practices that accentuate the fiery temperament.

Kapha (water and earth, tends to be very grounded, strong constitution) is similar to endomorph in that there is a tendency towards inertia, but great possibilities for endurance and strength.

¹⁵⁵ Sally Sevey Fit, *Dance Kinesiology...*

¹⁵⁶ Sally Sevey Fit, *Dance Kinesiology...*

Generally no individual falls under a solitary category, but rather has predominance in one or two areas, with numerous possible combinations thereof. Dominant characteristics will inform the practitioner how best to utilize asanas and diet in order to support the previously mentioned tendencies. In short, the Ayurvedic system has a wide variety of ways to support the key characteristics through diet, relaxation, and exercise that both approximate, and in my opinion enhance our western system of observation.¹⁵⁷

One reason why the knowledge of body type can be so useful is so that the dancer/practitioner can have greater objectivity as to what types of movement/warm up/exercises for which they have an affinity. Often times a dancer will practice first what comes most naturally, for instance a hypermobile dancer will often choose to warm up with stretches, versus a more useful overall body warm- up in combination of strengthening exercises. Understanding body type can lead to a more efficient and effective warm up and over all body care that supports the true needs of the individual dancer based on body type.

Understanding the dancer's body

Pain, injuries, imbalances:

As stated, studies have shown that there are a variety of injuries common to the dancer. There is a growing level of awareness concerning structure and kinesiology that each subsequent generation of dancers is increasingly benefiting from, as the information available is processed and incorporated into the systems of pedagogy. Sally Fitt has

¹⁵⁷ Dr. Vasant Lad, *Ayurveda: The Science of Self-Healing, A Practical Guide*, 2d. ed., (Lotus Press, 1985), 26 – 36.

addressed the usefulness of somatic disciplines, “Ideokinetic” understanding, common dance injuries, and the prevention of dance injuries. Fitt encourages dancers to listen to their body, recognize the value of listening to verses working through pain.

Dancers have a remarkable ability to dance through pain. The performance “high” often overshadows immediate pain. Yet it is important for dancers to recognize that pain is actually valuable information about the status of the body.”¹⁵⁸

Unfortunately, not all dancers process this feedback in the same manner; there are differences in how dancers perceive pain. Whereas some individuals respond to pain as a warning, others tend to ignore it, or become more competitive, or even catastrophize the pain, dwelling on the pain and despair. There is even dispute as to whether pain is seen as beneficial or detrimental for the dancer. There is still much to be learned about pain and its management, particularly in relation to gender, longevity of career, and other such variables. Nevertheless, the role of disregarding pain through denial, or overlooking is suspect in the chronic injury; it stands to reason that unidentified and untreated injuries may quickly progress from acute to chronic.¹⁵⁹

In order to avoid this progression, Fitt cautions the dancer to avoid covering up the symptoms, but rather to determine the location, source and cause of the pain in order to increase treatment effectiveness. For example, if there is an underlying structural imbalance both teacher and student can benefit from this knowledge. Congenital structural issues can range in degree of severity such as scoliosis, leg length variance, bowed or knock knees, and width of pelvis. All structural issues have a series of chain

¹⁵⁸ Sally Sevey Fitt, *Dance Kinesiology*...369.

¹⁵⁹ Maria L G. Encarnacion, Michael C. Meyers, Noel D. Ryan, Dale G. Pease, “Pain Coping Styles of Ballet Performers” *Journal of Sport Behavior* (March 2000) vol. 23, no. 1: 20-33.

reactions that, when understood, can empower the dancer and prevent further imbalances. Pronation and supination of the tarsus, tight hip flexors, leg length variance, and scoliosis are all examples of common imbalances that will have accompanying chain reactions.¹⁶⁰

Irene Dowd is a teacher and author whose work has presaged and facilitated somatic awareness and self-inquiry for the dancer for at least three decades. Dowd's masterwork, *Taking Root to Fly*, contains seven minimal essays aimed directly at the dancer. Each essay is both accessible and informative, and I have found the section on the foot to be a wonderful outline for a foot focus, and springboard for enhanced understanding. Andrea Olsen describes how vital our connection from the feet to our world is; the feet are our antennae, a means to distribute the weight of our body, giving stability and mobility, articulation, and shock absorption.

In the insect world, the feet are tongues for the moth! ...Our feet constantly inform us of the stability of our base. Whether we are on a boat or on land, on sand or on rocks, safe or uncertain, they respond accordingly.¹⁶¹

It is safe to say that the work of Irene Dowd was and is seminal in the transition of the dancer's identity traced in my work.

Dowd focuses greatly on balance in the pelvis and hips as a central element of healthy dance technique. Because balancing the muscles that cross the hip joint is crucial for establishing optimal alignment and facilitation of joint ease, Jean Couch, author of the *Runner's Yoga Book* recommends a series of yoga stretches that facilitates optimal movement patterns and increased circulation and organ function. Couch explains that if the muscular and ligamentous balance is too loose or too tight it will affect the placement

¹⁶⁰ Sally Sevey Fitt, *Dance Kinesiology*...

¹⁶¹ Andrea Olsen, *Body Stories: A Guide to Experiential Anatomy* (Station Hill, 1998), 105.

of the pelvis, and therefore joint function. Since the dancer's health necessitates optimal functionality at the hip joint, I have included a list of asanas outlined by Couch that are considered "hip openers". Once structural limitations are fully understood, as well as muscular/fascia limitations and needs of the individual, a dancer is ready to proceed.

Couch cautions to move in and out of the following poses with care due to the involvement and muscular connectivity of the knee and hip joint. For example, both the rectus femoris and tensor fasciae latae cross the knee and hip joint, and can be injured if judicious attention is not paid to while moving in and out of the asanas:

1. Sukhasana: tailor pose opens the hips, prepares the body for the more advanced poses (addresses adductor and external rotator muscles)
2. Baddha Konasana: bound angle pose increases mobility at hips, stretches the adductor muscles, increased circulation and organ function
3. Akarna Dhanurasana: Archer pose, addresses hamstring, muscles surrounding hips and knees, strengthens arm and back muscles
4. Ardha Padmasana: half lotus stretch
5. Standing and kneeling groin stretch: directly addresses the muscles that cross the front of the hip, the psoas, and rectus femoris, very important in balancing the disproportionate amount of hip flexion that occurs in any seated position including driving.
6. Lunges and variations: stretches the muscles that cross the front of the hip, thigh and knee, stretches back and neck

7. Natarajasana: Dancer's pose, stretches the muscles that cross the knee, hip, and thigh, strengthens the back.¹⁶²

The hamstrings and all other muscles of the hips such as the hard to reach Abductor muscles will need additional balancing, and can equally affect ease at the hip joint. (There are a wide variety of modifications for the hamstrings depending on the level of tightness, stability, and inadvertent involvement of the spine.

One of Irene Dowd's mentors and intellectual progenitors is a writer whose masterwork, *The Thinking Body*, opened the idea that mind and body are one and applied it to phenomenological experience. Mabel Todd's book addresses the reduction of strain due to pursuit of structural harmony:

To have a minimum of stress, and therefore of strain, within the body, not only must the structure as a whole be in balanced relation with the outside forces, {of gravity} but each part must be in balance with every other part within the system. This means that each part must be properly related to every other, remote as well as adjoining, if true mechanical balance is to obtain.¹⁶³

Due to the increasing need for dancers to explore the use of the arms and upper body, I have included additional information concerning the upper body. Judith Lasater offers a great resource on the shoulder joint through her experience as yoga teacher and physical therapist. She observes that the shoulder joint is deeply symbolic as to how we carry ourselves. Depending on whether or not we "carry the weight of the world", or "a chip on our shoulder", if we "have a good head on our shoulders", are "looking over our shoulder", the area around the shoulder joint can signify a sense of strength, power, and competence. In fact, the mood of an individual is apparent by the way the shoulders are

¹⁶² Jean Couch, *The Runner's Yoga Book: A Balanced Approach to Fitness* (Rodmell Press, 1990), 69-79.

¹⁶³ Mabel E. Todd, *The Thinking Body* (Paul B. Hoeber, Inc., 1937), 56.

held. You can try an experiment for yourself: round your shoulders forward, and notice how this action evokes a feeling of moving inward; it is both a protective gesture and suggests giving in to gravity, literally being in a slump. On the other hand, a yoga pose that opens the front of the body up can be energizing and exhilarating, an invitation for remaining emotionally available, with heart open.¹⁶⁴

Lasater's words on the shoulder are particularly clarifying. She describes the joint as being more shallow (about the size of half of a ping pong ball), less stable, and with far greater capacity for mobility than the hip joint. Although there is minimal contact necessary for the head of the humerus bone into the glenoid fossa in smaller movements, the head of the humerus must be depressed into the bottom two thirds of the lower portion of the glenoid fossa (the surface of the glenoid fossa is in the shape of a snowman, and the upper portion is optimal only for the smaller movements). This act of depression into the joint (and lower portion of the glenoid fossa) is essential for appropriate glenohumeral rhythm to occur, and extraordinarily important for joint stability. Often the head of the humerus stays in the upper area, and this can result in irritation of the joint tissue, causing the individual to utilize less range of motion, and consequently become locked into a vicious cycle.¹⁶⁵ Because many of the yoga poses incorporate carrying weight on the upper body, and therefore provide an opportunity for optimal joint functioning by moving the concavity over the convexity¹⁶⁶, dancers can benefit from utilizing this aspect of the asanas for rehabilitation, to gain strength, and upper body awareness.

¹⁶⁴ Judith Hanson Lasater

¹⁶⁵ Judith Hanson Lasater, Lecture on the shoulder joint.

¹⁶⁶ (Concavity of the glenoid fossa to articulate over the convexity of the head of the humerus).

Due to the repetitive nature of dance education and performance coupled with the typically high level of motivation and flexibility of the individual drawn to this field, one of the leading categories of dance injuries is undoubtedly from overuse. Mercyhurst College recently surveyed their dancers to investigate the quantity and type of injuries that had been incurred by its dance majors while in the city of Erie. The number of injuries due to joint instability and overuse were staggering. Although this is in a department where the goal is to develop a well-rounded dancer and individual who has a deep overall awareness, anatomical understanding, and technical foundation, there is clearly a need to further explore injury prevention and body/mind/spirit health in a more effective manner. It is my belief that the study of somatic disciplines (which does occur at this institution, although to a minor degree), and in particular the study of yoga, is one means for self discovery and injury prevention that a dancer can benefit from in a multitude of areas, particularly with a style or practice that supports the individual's needs and is anatomically and kinesiology sound.

In order to better understand the type, nature, and cause of some of these common injuries to dancers, I have compiled a number of examples of those injuries that surfaced in my research in both the areas of dance and yoga. The following examples are taken directly from my research in order that it might be possible to examine the tendencies, as well as provide what I hope will be a window into their use or abuse of yoga, and the resulting recovery and renewed direction, or lack thereof.

Dance and yoga injuries: the experiential

The Knee

One of the most common injuries found within the context of my research was to the joints, resulting from of an imbalance of stability to range of motion. Renée Jaworski, former dancer of Momix and more recently Pilobolus, stated that her body structure leaves her vulnerable to injury due to her ligamentous structure. Although an asset to the field of dance due to the potential range of motion available, the long, loose joints also make her more prone to joint injury. For instance, Jaworski had injured her right knee multiple times. One incidence occurred while rehearsing with the Momix Dance Company, and more recently in September of 2005, when Jaworski was forced to stop dancing, have a portion of the meniscus removed through arthroscopic surgery, and return to physical therapy. Miraculously, she returned to the stage within a month.

I had ripped the meniscus repeatedly - in college, with Momix, and last year. It looked like ripped fiberglass. The doctor took 20 % of the meniscus and really less than 50% is unheard of; that is why my recovery is so fast.¹⁶⁷

As a result of these injuries Jaworski is much more keenly aware and conscious of when her knee is being “torqued”, or pulled off its optimal neuromuscular pattern. She has had physical therapy along the way in order to rebalance the musculature around the knee, the first two times being much less intensive than the time following the surgery where it was necessary to rebuild the atrophied muscles, and relearn alignment of the knee. Jaworski described her muscle imbalance as being twofold: the lateral quad overpowers the medial quad, pulling the kneecap laterally, and the fact that her hamstrings and quad muscle group fight each other. Additionally, Jaworski tends to lock

¹⁶⁷ Renée Jaworski

her knees and hyperextend (due to the laxity in the joints) further creating instability. Having a greater understanding of the knee joint has aided in both recovering and muscular re-patterning, and increases the likelihood of prevention. Due to her ligamentous structure, it will be vital for her to continue to dance with awareness and muscular strength and balance in order to support her predisposition.

Braham was another candidate for chronic knee injuries due to hyper-extending in the knees, inwardly rotating the hip joints, retracting the pelvis, all of which evolved out of her early ballet training. Ultimately, Braham had surgery on both knees, including a lateral release (this was prior to using physical therapy to aid in better tracking of the knee), however this did not eradicate the neuromuscular patterning, nor did it benefit the overall level of stability in the joint. For this Braham sought out and found other resources to assist her, including the work of Elaine Sommer. It was with Sommer's work that Braham was able to begin to grasp how the patterning was manifesting itself:

It was in Elaine Sommer's work that I initially learned not to inwardly rotate (in my hip). She was the first one that articulated that. And it was a great gift, and a key...And the hyperextending...I guess (the knowledge was) empowering for myself - it wasn't just about strengthening quads¹⁶⁸

Astanga teacher and practitioner Sarah Plummer has also experienced a variety of joint injuries throughout her dance and yoga career, due to her very ligamentous and hypermobile body structure. It is possible to see how challenging it was for Plummer to maintain stability within the context of her dancing:

I also had a meniscal tear. When dancing {this aggravated it} my knee would "go out" at times during pirouettes, changing directions, it would get swollen within a few days. Any kind of torque would trigger this. When the knee is bent {I was more susceptible to knee injury}, as I go into relevé, fouté, or pirouette.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Susan Braham

¹⁶⁹ Sarah Plummer

According to Judith Hanson Lasater, the knee joint is one of the most misunderstood and complicated joints of the body. Many consider this joint a pure hinge, but along with the possibility of flexion and extension, is also a small degree of rotation and also gliding of the joint while moving in and out of flexion and extension. Hyperextending the knee actually overstretches the ligamentous structure, primarily that of the Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL), and this type of injury is near impossible to heal due to the low degree of blood circulation to that area. Additionally, the knee joint has very little supporting musculature, and is literally a prisoner to the two surrounding joints, the hip and ankle.¹⁷⁰

Because the body is a closed system, what occurs in the joint just above or below has direct ramifications upon the integrity of the joint in question.¹⁷¹ For instance, if the musculature is tight around the hips, or if one has a tendency to either pronate or supinate the foot, the muscular imbalance will trigger a chain reaction by either pulling the tibia either medially (in pronation) or laterally (in supination), thereby destabilizing the joint, and overstretching the affected ligaments.¹⁷²

One can discern if knee joint imbalance is a result of the ankle by examining the verticality of the achilles tendon, as well as overall weight distribution, facing of toes, and support of arches. It can be helpful for a dancer to utilize imagery, such as growing roots into the earth, and to find the relationship of the ischial tuberosities to the heel in order to clarify joint alignment and efficiency.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Judith Hanson Lasater, lecture on knee joint: November 14, 2006.

¹⁷¹ Andrea Watkins and Priscilla M. Clarkson, *Dancing Longer, Dancing Stronger...*

¹⁷² Judith Hanson Lasater, *Lecture on knee*.

¹⁷³ Eric Franklin, *Dynamic Alignment Through Imagery* (Human Kinetics, 1996), 176.

Many times the ineffective alignment can be from a misunderstanding of where the patella should optimally point in joint alignment. According to Lasater, a common misunderstanding is to assume that the patella would be centrally located, however due to the angle of the femur bone, (as seen from the proximal and lateral origin at the hip joint angling medially to the distal end, at the knee) this is not so; there is a slight degree of medial facing of the patella in a neutral stance. Lasater believes that the majority of dancers (and population at large) tend to position their patella lateral to optimal alignment due to this misunderstanding, improper foot usage, or tightness in the muscles around the hip such as the gluteus medius and ITB, or ilio-tibial band. The lateral quads can also laterally pull on the kneecap, again creating dysfunction, and reinforcing the neuromuscular pattern of overstretching the Anterior Cruciate Ligament. Lasater recommends utilizing the simple exercises offered by Pete Egoscue, in his book *Pain Free* in order to remind the primary movers of their job, and pay particular attention to the alignment.

Egoscue suggests letting gravity reset the muscles around the hips by lying on the floor in parallel, with the lower legs supported by a chair at a 90-degree angle. Secondly, sit on a chair with a gentle arch in the back, release the abdominal muscles and, with legs in parallel and hips and knees at a 90 degree angle, stimulate the adductors and abductors by squeezing legs into a block or pillow. Thirdly, sit in an L shape on the floor with back and shoulders to the wall and activate legs to establish the shoulder, hip, knee, and ankle

connection. The sequence closes with two variations of *supta padangusthasana*; lying with legs supported in parallel, one leg extended, the other bent at a 90-degree angle.¹⁷⁴

Lasater also recommends modifications for basic standing poses, such as raising the heel in poses such as standing forward bend, or *uttanasana*, in order to deny the body of its habitual pattern to hyperextend and over stretch the ligaments. She recommends that the practitioner with a history of knee injury be mindful of alignment and avoidance of the detrimental neuromuscular patterning.¹⁷⁵

Michelle Doyle, founder of *Deuxmensions Dance*, has dislocated her knee three to four times, two of which were very serious, and included torn ligaments (most likely the Anterior Cruciate Ligament). Doyle said that although she has successfully avoided surgery through physical therapy, there is reoccurring pain, and very little cartilage intact.

Her recipe for stabilization has been:

1. Weight training; particularly for the quads and sartorius.
2. Pilometrics: Jumping, and stepping off different levels, using weights to amplify muscle strength and joint responsiveness.
3. One-legged *plié*
4. Strengthening the muscles around the knees: hamstring, quads, adductors, abductors, and calve muscles
5. Leg raises¹⁷⁶

Doyle also has hypermobility, as well as bursitis in her right hip, and has had stress fractures in her shins, and sacrum issues that she attributes to aging. The fact that there is a reoccurring problem of joint instability is evident. The use of weight training and pilometrics appear to be supporting the area around the knee, but not repatterning the established neuromuscular pattern.

¹⁷⁴ Pete Egoscue, *Pain Free: A Revolutionary Method For Stopping Chronic Pain* (Bantam Books, 1998), 93-97.

¹⁷⁵ Judith Hanson Lasater, *Lecture on the knee joint*, (November 14, 2006).

¹⁷⁶ Michelle Doyle

Leslie Kaminoff, a yoga teacher who has had a great deal of experience working with dancers, strongly believes that some poses, like Lotus, are counterproductive for the dancer. Kaminoff has had surgeries in both knees due to torn cartilage; in fact he can tell by a description over the phone whether or not it's the cartilage from the symptoms and joint sounds (if any) accompanying the injury described. Kaminoff relates that there is no way to protect the structure of both of the knee joints in lotus pose, and therefore, regardless as to whether you still have your cartilage, does not see the point to practicing full lotus. When asked if there were any poses that he avoids he responded:

Sure. Lotus. I've had surgeries in both knees. I've had torn cartilage in both knees. And you think now that I don't have any cartilage there is nothing left to tear, but I think lotus is a bit of a pointless posture. My view is that if you can do it, you don't need to. And if you can't, you shouldn't even try. It has to do with the structure of the knee joint. There is no way to protect both of your knees when getting into lotus.¹⁷⁷

Although many teachers and students dispute the ratio of healing benefits to risk for lotus pose, there does need to be caution exerted when practicing lotus due to the possibility of rotation in the knee joint while in flexion:

You can protect the first knee, by fully flexing it. In a fully flexed knee the cartilage is protected. And then you can rotate it {the leg} into position. But you cannot do that with the 2nd leg you bring into lotus. You have to combine flexion and rotation of that joint to get that 2nd foot on top of that thigh. And that is what gets the cartilage, and its just a matter of time, you do it enough and for whatever reason one day that cartilage will not be in position and it'll be pulled in 2 directions simultaneously by the flexion and rotation, and pop – and it doesn't heal.¹⁷⁸

This was exactly what had happened to Kaminoff. Although he had early injuries due to falling off the high bar in gym class, his knees were harmed by all the years of sitting in

¹⁷⁷ Leslie Kaminoff

¹⁷⁸ Leslie Kaminoff

the ashram, cross-legged, in meditation. He would notice stiffness, but he did not realize at the time that the joint was being gradually weakened:

It {the knee deterioration} was aggravated by all the years in the ashram sitting cross-legged...in meditation. It would be stiff after I got up from prolonged sitting, and then one day in LA after a class, I did what I had done a 1,000 times before, I sat down in front of the class, folded my right leg in and grabbed my left foot and pulled into not even lotus, half lotus, and (pop) the whole class heard it pop. It had been gradually weakened, and it was the last straw.¹⁷⁹

Kaminoff remains hopeful, however, and has very few residual symptoms. His course of action: To do what he enjoys, but try to avoid doing the risky things, and utilize yoga on an as needed basis.

{It's} not a totally normal knee, but I have no symptoms of arthritis. {Portions of} the medial meniscus is missing on both the left and right sides. I play a lot of basketball, but then I'll feel it in my knees or going down the stairs. ...I avoid risky things.¹⁸⁰

This particular joint is vulnerable, Kaminoff explains, due its positioning between the two longest levers in the body, and he cautions using great care in order to preserve the joint's integrity and longevity.

The knee joint is a very vulnerable joint. It is between the two longest levers in your body. An enormous amount of force can be exerted on the structures of the knee. You have to take care of it – it is a frequently injured part of the body in yoga.¹⁸¹

Due to the previous discussion of knee to hip correlation, it is not surprising to learn that the musculature around the hips is also tight for Renée Jaworski. This, states Jaworski, is a direct result of the necessary stabilizing work in Pilobolus, and yoga has been one means to reestablish balance and find relief in this area.

¹⁷⁹ Leslie Kaminoff

¹⁸⁰ Leslie Kaminoff

¹⁸¹ Leslie Kaminoff

My hips are very tight from working with Pilobolus. I've built up all this muscle on my outer hips that prevents me from turning out. The glut med – I've lost a lot of turnout because of that. This (yoga) sequence (at Jivamukti) opens the hips.¹⁸²

The muscles of the lateral leg are often difficult to stretch. Watkins and Clarkson suggest standing with the tight side to the wall, crossing the same tight leg behind the other, and leaning the hips towards the wall.¹⁸³ Deep tissue and muscle massage can also provide relief and assist in muscular rebalancing, as well as utilizing a foam roller.

Understanding optimal alignment is vital. Often a dancer or teacher will choose to prize the 180-degree turnout aesthetic over structural alignment – either consciously, or unconsciously. It is now known that bringing the two anterior superior iliac spines and the pubic symphysis into the same vertical plane is a preferable method to determining whether or not a pelvis is “neutrally oriented”. In that way, there is no confusion about mistaking a larger gluteal muscle for lumbar lordosis.¹⁸⁴ The sacrum can then rest at a 30-degree angle from the vertical, the lumbar lordosis remains neutral (curved); the boney structure of the pelvis and spine forming a wedge for optimal stability and shock absorption from the upper to lower body.¹⁸⁵

The vertebral column

Another injury that Renée Jaworski had accrued was directly linked to the highly athletic nature of her work in Pilobolus. Jaworski sites that she also has a “bulging disc”

¹⁸² Renée Jaworski

¹⁸³ Andrea Watkins and Priscilla M. Clarkson, *Dancing Longer, Dancing Stronger: A Dancer's Guide to Improving Technique and Preventing Injury* (Princeton Book Company, 1990), 163.

¹⁸⁴ Andrea Watkins and Priscilla M. Clarkson, *Dancing Longer, Dancing Stronger...*

¹⁸⁵ Judith Hanson Lasater

in her lumbar spine that is most likely from the repetitive and forceful impact involved in the piece *Mega Watt*, a violent, relentless, and brutal piece set to heavy metal, head-banging music. She stated that she was able to heal this particular injury from a combination of traction and yoga.

The traction let the fibers around it {the injury} heal, and doing that over a period of 4 weeks, and strengthening the muscles around it, as well as strengthening my core.¹⁸⁶

Jaworski has found yoga to be extremely helpful in body conditioning and awareness, and she continues her yoga practice that she maintains for the most part on her own, in addition to supplemental classes at Jivamukti when she is home from tour.

I believe that whereas the impact of this particular piece undoubtedly was an aggravator to back pain, the degree of lifting involved in Pilobolus (a company that utilizes a system of leverage and shared body weight to manipulate and discover new body configurations) cannot be overlooked when examining Jaworski's back injury. I will endeavor to further discuss the effects of lifting on the structure of the vertebral column within the next case scenario.

Dancer/choreographer/practitioner Christopher Caines, who is currently healthy, has additionally experienced back pain, necessitating occasional chiropractic treatment. Caines first injured his back in a modern class, although he has a family history of back injury: his father and father's younger brother have both had disc surgery and spinal fusions. Caines described how his spine has areas of both hypo and hyperflexibility:

My lumbar spine is tight; I have very little mobility in the lowest lumbar and have compensated by developing extreme hyper-mobility above that.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Renée Jaworski

¹⁸⁷ Christopher Caines

Consequently, the area where these two extremes converge has been subject to a number of low back injuries. There was one tour to China where Caines, performing the physically brutal, but beautiful work of Sin-cha Hong, suffered an impinged nerve in the sacrum:

It was like a bullet shot sideways through my sacrum that resulted in numbness from my hip to little toe. The numbness gradually receded, but in my toe it didn't go away for a year.¹⁸⁸

Caines went on to say that the low back area has also been susceptible to injury off the dance floor. For instance, once he had twisted his spine while carrying an enormous weight.

One time moving a dance floor, I really tore my lower back apart. I couldn't stand up. It took me an hour to stand. I went to the chiropractor... but it was not a dance injury.¹⁸⁹

Due to the hypermobility of his spine, this area will remain a vulnerable area throughout his life; Caines will have to be particularly mindful as to how he is loading the spine, particularly with added weight in flexion and rotation. Caines is aware of the impact of the vicious combination of stress, high metabolism, and a seated part time office job in corporate America. All of these factors, coupled with the fact that since he is a man, and often the tallest, it will be likely that he will be responsible for a great deal of lifting in the choreography he is a part of. There was one piece (not his own work) where he had about fifty lifts in a period of twenty-five minutes. He injured his neck in that show.

The situation that Caines has described above reflects the high degree of vulnerability and risk that is typical of a dancer with hypermobile joints coupled with a

¹⁸⁸ Christopher Caines

¹⁸⁹ Christopher Caines

high workload including both repetitive movements and added weight. It also elucidates the immediate importance of creating muscular balance in order to support joint flexibility. In order to continue this partnering work, it is vital that the lifting is supported in a sound and kinesiological manner. Blandine Calais-Germain uses lucid drawings of the effects of lifting objects or persons with a “loaded spine”, and how this damages the shock absorbing system of the spine and creates the potential for nerve compression.¹⁹⁰

I will explain how this occurs as the spine moves into flexion. Since the bodies of each vertebra are connected by fibrocartilaginous intervertebral discs that provide shock absorption, it is crucial to understand how the nucleus pulposus (found centrally within) acts as the gel in a cold pack by slowly moving to accommodate the action of the spinal joints. Because it is fluid, it converts compressive forces into lateral axial forces by spreading in a way that is sometimes called “bulging”. During flexion, or forward bending, the intervertebral disc is compressed anteriorly, and expanded posteriorly, while the nucleus pulposus responds by moving posteriorly. This all occurs while the superior articular facets slide on the inferior ones, causing the vertebral arches to pull apart in places as well as the connecting ligaments to stretch. Because the entire intervertebral disc as well as the nucleus pulposus is simultaneously compressed, the disc acts as a shock absorber as long as the wear and tear of aging or overuse has not caused the area surrounding the nucleus pulposus to form cracks. Fluid of the nucleus can leak from these cracks (a condition called a herniated, or ruptured disc), which can often cause compression on the surrounding nerves. This condition is most frequently a result of chronic or sudden and extreme movements of flexion, and frequently creates an

¹⁹⁰ Blandine Calais-Germain, *Anatomy of Movement*, rev. ed. (Eastland Press, 1991), 33-39.

overbearing tension on the posterior longitudinal ligament as well as subsequent and chronic pain in the lumbar spine region.¹⁹¹

Sarah Plummer is another dancer/yogini that has experienced acute pain in her lumbar spine, where she has accrued a herniated disc. When this injury is acute, (this has happened twice) Plummer is unable to do any forward bends and is limited to modified and gentle back bends. She described how limited her movement vocabulary becomes in the acute stage, and how she has an aversion to back bending due to the pain.

In addition, and probably contributing to her back pain, is her left sacroiliac joint, which is unstable, and “goes out pretty regularly”. Her right hip is longer (and therefore higher), and the result is monolateral sacro-iliac malposition with the ilium anterior. Due to the shape of the female pelvis, and subsequent degree of destabilization (particularly when seated), sacroiliac pain is more common in women, and is further aggravated in such poses as spinal twists when utilizing a “fixed” pelvis (as is often the case in pilates). Lasater recommends allowing the left foot to extend further on the mat when twisting to the right, and inviting the pelvis to participate in the twist.¹⁹²

Plummer’s most recent herniation has affected her right side, but her pain is deferred to the left side at the site of the left sacroiliac joint. Plummer finds relief by simulating symmetry in non-weight bearing positions. Her method is to come into a posterior pelvic tilt keeping her feet and legs parallel (vs. utilizing lateral rotation, a common neuromuscular pattern for dancers), which gives her the feeling of reduced compression. Plummer also described that she will reach her right sitting bone to her heel so they are more level in order to create relief.

¹⁹¹ Blandine Calais-Germain, *Anatomy of Movement...*

¹⁹² Judith Hanson Lasater

It should be noted here that the use of external rotation in back bending is not only very common, but also tends to aggravate lumbar pain, distributing the majority of the extension to the more hypermobile, and therefore more vulnerable area. Additionally, most dancers, being locked tight in the lateral rotators will need to gain awareness of this patterning as well as stretch the lateral rotators. Additionally, there is some discrepancy within the dance and yoga world as to whether or not nutation¹⁹³ should occur during a backbend. Lasater is in favor of the entire spine participating in a backbend, that the point is to evenly stretch the front of the body; however pilates and many other teachers in both dance and yoga teach to slightly counter-nutate (bring the pelvis into a posterior pelvic tilt). In fact, relief of symptomatic pain differs from individual. My supposition is that those individuals who think of counter-nutation in a back bend are seeking stability and even distribution, and may have tight hip flexors, which can pull the pelvis into an anterior pelvic tilt from the lumbar region.

Sarah Plummer believes that the practice of yoga, as well as the extensive work with Irene Dowd has helped her. In fact, Plummer stopped spraining her ankles when she started doing yoga. Trained in Astanga yoga, Plummer has been working intensely with and for her teacher, Eddie Stearn, for the past 10 years, and has studied in India many times. In addition to this mentoring relationship, Plummer has also completed a teacher-training program with Erik Schiffmann that is Iyengar and vinyasa based. There have been times that Plummer has had to alter, or stop her practice completely due to some serious injuries that had occurred during her yoga journey. Plummer doesn't believe that

¹⁹³ H. David Coulter (*Anatomy of Hatha Yoga*) explains nutation as being the movement at the sacroiliac joints that brings the top of the sacrum anteriorly (in relation to the ilia), the coccyx rotates Posteriorly, the bones of the ilia move medially, and the ischial tuberosities laterally. The opposite is true for counter-nutation.

yoga is the cause of her injuries however, but rather the manner in which her imbalances (and neuromuscular patternings) are revealed.

My yoga practice reveals imbalances through injuries – and, I believe they are old injuries – such as trauma to the joints - Irene {Dowd} believes this – little things as a dancer that are showing up now. Because yoga works the body very deeply, they are revealed as a new injury. {They are} actually from old injuries such as from scar tissues, or weakness due to loose ligaments.¹⁹⁴

In addition to her innate body structure, Plummer realizes that the nature of her work contributes to her susceptibility to injury:

My injuries are a reflection of my hypermobility. My injuries come from teaching, from lifting people {while assisting and facilitating their practice}.¹⁹⁵

When in rehabilitation, Plummer combines her work with Irene Dowd, physical therapy, and other pilates-based exercises, resuming her Mysore yoga practice once past the acute stages. The following section demonstrates methods which have enabled Plummer to work through and manage both pain and injury.

For example, Plummer deals with stretching the hamstrings differently when managing back pain. She utilizes the following tips:

1. Using a block in Utthita Trikonasana in order to decrease spinal involvement, stretch the hamstrings, laterally stretch the spine, avoid further injuring the back, and provide relief to her glutei (in spasm as a result of her injury). Purpose = relieve tension and develop strength.
2. Modify all forward bends by changing the relationship to gravity, and practicing them with hands against the wall such as in half uttanasana. *If there is trouble with a practitioner in finding flexion at the hips versus in

¹⁹⁴ Sarah Plummer

¹⁹⁵ Sarah Plummer

the spine, it is possible to raise the hands on the wall, thereby lessening the degree of spinal flexion. (Bob Anderson recommends modifying the forces of gravity, as in lying on the back with one leg around 90 degrees flexion as in *supta padangusthasana*.¹⁹⁶

It is important to note how integral the use of props can be when modifying asanas, and how we are only limited by our imagination when finding ways to adapt a pose for our immediate needs. Books can be used for blocks, walls, chairs for reducing joint mobility and increasing support. These modified hamstring stretches not only relieved tension from Plummer's pain, but also helped to strengthen the neurological system as well. In the acute stages Plummer would further minimize flexion and enhance stability:

I found that lying on the floor and doing really subtle abdominal work to tone and integrate {the body was helpful}. {In the} beginning {I} couldn't do flexion in my spine at all, had to find ways. {I} did abdominals on my back with knees bent. {I would do} one leg lifts for trunk stability on the floor without spinal flexion - that was essential. I could do very tiny cobras - to strengthen the erector spinae - and strengthen gluts, laying flat, lifting legs. I used floor work with a really stabilized torso, lumbar area especially.¹⁹⁷

The amount of spinal involvement would directly correlate with the stage of healing and degree of injury. Plummer also incorporates her dance training to support the recovery process:

Then I would take that into standing. I could do plies, {and other barre work} and I could rotate the pelvis on the femur, so I would do a lot of that like standing on one leg in parallel and turned out. I could do a lot, that {barre work} didn't flex the spine, but strengthened and stabilized my pelvis. I couldn't do the pelvic clock at first, depending on the stages. In the acute stage I could do pilates-based exercises and physical therapy, {on all fours}, lift the right leg, left arm - no

¹⁹⁶ Anderson, Bob, *Stretching: The 20th Anniversary*, rev. ed. (Shelter Publications, 2000), 58.

¹⁹⁷ Sarah Plummer

spinal flexion. When I am well, it doesn't feel like anything, but in the acute stage...it helps to strengthen the multifidi.¹⁹⁸

Due to the fact that the nucleus pulposus responds to forward bending, or flexion, by moving posteriorly, forward bends are generally more of a liability for yoga teachers and practitioners. Lasater recommends letting the practitioner help you to determine a place where the student does not feel pain as a place to begin. Generally, modifications of back bending tends to be less risky for those who suffer from spinal injuries, enabling the individual to open their heart, and reverse the deep pattern of forward bending that our sedentary culture tends toward.¹⁹⁹

The hip

One of the most common areas of trauma and overuse is the hip joint. Many famous dancers such as Balanchine's beloved Suzanne Farrell and Graham dancer Peggy Lyman have required hip replacement surgery during the later to end of their career, and Sara Rudner was no exception. Rudner found that whereas yoga was a more complete system, due to the carriage of weight on the upper body, it did not address the aspect of moving into space. Rudner blended the tradition of yoga with Tai Chi to aid in her rehabilitation:

At around 50 I had a hip replacement on my right hip, which made a huge difference for me. Then instead of going to yoga, I went to Tai Chi. I went to martial arts to do my rehab and my own dancing. And I found slow balanced work in the vertical plane only (in martial arts and tai chi you are limited in terms of the relationship to gravity). That is why the yoga system is a lot more complete, but what it doesn't do is move. What I found was that it didn't put you on your feet moving (the astanga, I never did the astanga work – or vinyasa - that tends to flow, but it's not in spatial motion. You know, from foot to foot, from

¹⁹⁸ Sarah Plummer

¹⁹⁹ Lasater, *Lecture*.

forward to back, it doesn't do that, it does something else). I found the tai chi a wonderful balance to the information I was getting from yoga.²⁰⁰

Initial hip injuries began for Sarah Plummer while she was attending the North Carolina School of the Arts, at age fifteen. She developed tendonitis in her hip flexors, most likely due to a blend of contributing causes such as overuse (from the repetitive movements of ballet and dance) in combination with a structural imbalance, and joint instability. Although the hip pain went away after the first year, for the last 3-4 years Plummer has been experiencing pain in her hips again during yoga practice, which appears to be aggravated by scar tissue.

Also, my hip joints, the tendonitis that I experienced the first year of N.C. School of the Arts – that was resolved through ultra sound...is now showing up as pain in the hips. It feels like the psoas - at the femur attachment – {and} shows up in hip flexion. The hip flexion pain comes and goes. It is either the sacroiliac or hip - often hurting alternatively - right at the attachment of tendon of psoas – femur. When I do deep hip openers – this irritates the joint.²⁰¹

Danielle Robinson-Prater of Minneapolis, MN was another dancer that struggled with issues concerning hypermobility. Yoga, pilates, and laban bartenieff exercises have all become tools for enhancing connectivity, differentiating between tension and strength, developing greater core strength, as well as greater physical understanding and control. This has been a process, however, and Robinson Prater has suffered many injuries along the way due to lax ligaments. The severity of these injuries range from a broken toe, recurrent tendonitis in the right ankle, to a more severe injury: dislocation of both hips. She loves practicing sun salutations now, up and down dog, plank and addressing the muscles around the hip in such poses as ankle to thigh, upside down butterfly (which

²⁰⁰ Sara Rudner

²⁰¹ Sarah Plummer

could potentially aggravate the situation, by using weight to force a greater degree of rotation at the hip joint), and Gomukhasana (to stretch the lateral rotators).²⁰²

Another dancer/yoga teacher cited two injuries in the hip joint that occurred during assisted stretching in Upavistha Konasana, a seated forward bend with the legs in what dancers call a wide second position and the torso in a forward bend. Adding weight to the pelvic area is a fairly common adjustment in the yoga and dance world, and unfortunately can bring the joints into a wider range of motion than the practitioner is able to handle in that moment. I thought of this story when I observed my daughter and her classmates receiving a similar assisted stretch in her ballet class. I truly believe more research in this area would be beneficial to the dance and yoga community alike. No one wants to learn from experience in this manner – neither as the practitioner/dancer nor as the teacher.

I had {this happen} a couple of times when I was assisting, about 5 years ago. When I was adjusting someone and I – heard a pop – And - oh my gosh, I can't believe that just happened - you can't believe it just happened...fortunately they did not feel like victims, and took responsibility. One was in Upavistha Konasana. The second time {it happened} it seemed like I was moving with the person – maybe they were feeling that they could go further – and then it was too far. So actually I adjust that completely differently than I used to. I usually go from the base upward, - I try to ground them more, so that I am not actually pushing or pulling them forward. I'm just going with – and giving them a little more guidance and staying power – you know there is a pulsing that is up and down which is not – you know even just a little bit of bouncing is not the most effective...I just guide the person to stay – even if they could go deeper, just to stay - because they are at the edge, for the most part. That was the only one, and it actually happened twice. Both people had a stiffness about them, but also a hyper-mobility in the joints. Fortunately that was a long time ago, when I first started...²⁰³

²⁰² Danielle Robinson-Prater

²⁰³ Anonymous

Rumors circulate about this type of injury during assisted stretching within the dance and yoga communities. Leslie Kaminoff was able to confirm my suspicion that this is so, stating that he has treated numerous injuries that have been a result of either assisted stretches, or adjustments:

Without revealing any names, I can confirm that I have treated NUMEROUS people who have been injured in yoga class by assisted stretches or adjustments by teachers. The most common are: torn hamstrings and adductors, torn knee cartilage, and torn rotator cuff muscles. There have also been a number of accidental impact injuries from students falling into others, and a couple of facial injuries to teachers from students jumping unexpectedly into headstand or handstand. These are the acute injuries. Of course, the more common and pervasive problems result from the chronic overuse/repetitive stresses that inappropriate yoga asana practice can put on the body.²⁰⁴

Peggy Gould was also able to confirm that this is how two of her injuries have occurred:

The injuries that I have experienced with assisted stretches in yoga class were {to my} hamstrings, injuries at the muscle insertion on the ischial tuberosity. The “assistance was downward pressure on my back by the teacher in seated forward bending poses...I have also had some shoulder issues after working with ropes in an Iyengar class with a particular teacher.²⁰⁵

Bearing in mind that a student will, at some point, be asked to stretch a muscle forcefully, it is important that he/she understands what is being asked of her body. Lulu Sweigard, mentor of Irene Dowd, recommends understanding that these forceful stretches place muscle fibers, fascia, muscle tendons, ligaments, nerves, and blood vessels all under tensile stress. Although there are varying degrees of elasticity, there are limits.²⁰⁶

Whereas muscle fiber has the ability to stretch 1.6 times its original length prior to tearing (and can stretch while contracting), fascia elasticity can vary in individuals, and with prolonged stress can be permanently elongated. Muscle tendon, similar to fascia, is

²⁰⁴ Leslie Kaminoff

²⁰⁵ Peggy Gould

²⁰⁶ Lulu Sweigard, *Human Movement Potential: Its Ideokinetic Facilitation* (Harper & Row, 1974), 139-140.

elastic, and can withstand stress greater than that of muscle, which can eventually lead to tearing at the junction of tendon with either muscle or bone. Reduced blood supply, which can occur as early as the 3rd decade can compromise such important tendons as the achilles and patella tendons. Ligaments that are exposed to high levels of tensile stress, such as the flava ligaments of the spine, have a higher degree of elasticity, and therefore greater capacity for rebounding from stretch. They are not immune, however, and such patterns as a slouched posture or high degree of spinal flexion such as in dance and yoga can render these ligaments weak, elongated, and inefficient. This is true to an even greater degree with ligaments that are mainly comprised of non-elastic fibers, such as the deltoid ligament (medial ankle weakened due to pronation²⁰⁷) as well as the ligaments previously discussed surrounding the knee. Nerve fibers and blood vessels are also susceptible to damage; due to their soft tissue they may bleed when muscles are forcefully stretched.²⁰⁸

Judith Hanson Lasater has a number of suggestions for the student to keep in mind when attending a yoga class. She recommends remaining open and mindful to your yoga experience by maintaining clarity of your own motivation and experience, and by keeping your student/teacher relationship in perspective. Firstly, you are in charge of your experience. Trust and honor yourself by accepting feedback that feels appropriate for you and communicate (after class) your preferences or concerns.²⁰⁹ Additionally, Hanson Lasater reminds the student of their role in choosing in the teacher. For example, Hanson Lasater feels strongly that the teacher can only share from her own experiences:

²⁰⁷ Frank H. Netter, M.D. *Atlas of Human Anatomy*, 2nd Ed. (MediMedia, 1997), 491.

²⁰⁸ Lulu Sweidgard, *Human Movement Potential...* 140.

²⁰⁹ Judith Hanson Lasater, *30 Essential Yoga Poses for Beginning Students and Their Teachers* (Rodmell Press, 2003), 8.

Inevitably, the internal relationship a teacher has with her personal practice is revealed through her attitude, actions, and language in class. So check out the teacher. Is your need for respect met when she speaks to you, or adjusts you in a pose? Does your teacher sometimes cross a verbal or physical boundary which you would prefer be maintained? These observations can lead you to find a class that meets your needs for safety and respect.²¹⁰

Certainly, the issue of injuries through assisted stretches and adjustments is an area ripe for further investigation to enhance injury prevention for both teachers and students alike. Nevertheless, it is comforting to remember that the student plays a crucial role in this unique dynamic.

Overuse, misuse, and patterns

Dancer Christopher Caines also notes a handful of injuries that include bruised toes, tendonitis of the ankle and a shoulder strain, also implying the tendency for overuse and need for ongoing joint stabilization. One of these was described as “ferocious tendonitis” to his right ankle that was a result of jumping on the then un-sprung floor at the Cunningham studio when he was on scholarship there in the late 1980s (the floor has since been sprung). The strained shoulder was a result of repeating the same dive fall dozens of times at an audition for Momix, a company that Caines quickly realized was not for him.

Christopher Caines did experience one yoga injury however, and this was to the elbow joint while studying yoga at Om Yoga, where all teachers taught a similar style of vinyasa hatha yoga²¹¹. He stated that while very committed to his studies there he

²¹⁰ Judith Hanson Lasater, *30 Essential Yoga Poses*...6.

²¹¹ Vinyasa, meaning breath-synchronized movement, is a general term that is used to describe many different types of classes.

developed crippling tennis elbow in both arms, as a result of a directive that was in opposition to his dance training. At Om Yoga the emphasis was on external rotation of the upper arm and internal rotation of the lower arm, the reverse of his dance training, which had emphasized internal rotation of the upper arm, and external rotation of the lower arm. The degree of repetition, in addition to the directive, were both contributing factors, since vinyasa yoga is known for incorporating multiple sun salutations, where shoulder girdle and arm placement are utilized in weight bearing positions such as down dog and forearm stand. Caines noted that he felt Cindy Lee, founder of Om Yoga, and the teachers she trained, were very insistent about that aspect of alignment. The pain he developed was so debilitating that he was unable to lift a glass of water with one hand and had to open the door with his whole body; it “destroyed his grip strength”.²¹² (This is a symptom of severe tennis elbow.)

Like many other dancers in this field, Caines had no medical insurance. Sports Medicine experts and authors Requa and Garrick determined in their research concerning dancers and medical insurance what is already common knowledge within the dance community. Not only are dancers in small and part time companies rarely covered, but it is also common for these same dancers to fail to seek treatment due to their inability to pay.²¹³

Caines, in a similar situation, did receive one cortisone injection from a doctor friend in Canada, although he was spooked enough to forego his yoga practice altogether for seven years. It was not until recently (2005) that he decided that he missed yoga

²¹² Christopher Caines

²¹³ Ralph K. Requa, M.S.P.H., and James G. Garrick, M.D. “Do Professional Dancers Have Medical Insurance? Company-Provided Medical Insurance for Professional Dancers” *Journal of Dance Medicine and Science* (2005) vol. 9, no. 3&4 : 31-3.

enough to return to another type of yoga at a studio where he had received a discount coupon from an acquaintance. He now has a monthly membership, and attends class 2-5x a week. His focus has shifted to trusting his own body and extensive training. He now thinks of firming in the triceps vs. rolling up the muscles, and whenever he feels a little twinge, he utilizes an alignment adjustment to avoid re-aggravating the joint.²¹⁴

...Where I study now, at Yoga Works, many styles are taught. However, no teacher overemphasizes this contrary rotation at the elbow, and there is a much greater emphasis on an attitude that reflects the idea that students – especially advanced students like me- know their own bodies and their own practice.²¹⁵

Upon hearing Caines' symptoms and descriptions, my supposition is that the glenohumeral rhythm has been a contributing factor in this scenario, and that the language used in classes has been segmented, focusing on one aspect of alignment versus the total symphony that occurs with the bones and muscles in asana. For instance, in order to accomplish full flexion and/or abduction at the shoulder joint, the humerus does externally rotate, but this is not the singular action. As previously stated, the scapulae must also participate in upward rotation. Imagining the lateral border of the shoulder-blades are gliding towards the little finger, and the medial border are descending to the waist enables the practitioner to feel the freedom in the shoulder joint and girdle, as well as stability (refer to previous section on shoulder joint). The elbow alignment should be additionally assessed, by examining the facing of the elbow joint (this should be medially oriented when weight bearing), and determining whether or not there is hyperextension,

²¹⁴ Christopher Caines

²¹⁵ Christopher Caines

or recurvation at the elbow joint (angle larger than 180 degrees between the olecranon process and its fossa).²¹⁶

Yoga has become a tool for Aviva Geismar as she faces and works through injury. She uses the asanas for rehabilitation, managing the toll of her high physical impact career on her forty-year-old body, as well as managing the accompanying fear and frustration of losing the ability to dance in a manner she was both accustomed to and desired. Her main injuries have been to her gastrocnemius:

I tore my gastrocnemius repeatedly. Ten years ago I first tore it, took six weeks to heal. I tore it again, but it didn't completely immobilize me... The third tear took about a year to totally recover from. That was the one that I kept re-injuring from when it was getting close to recovery.²¹⁷

Because as dancers we often identify ourselves with our bodies, an injury can be particularly frightening, and it can become difficult to back off enough for full recovery and re-patterning to take place. It can take a great deal of love for dance to overcome injuries that are debilitating beyond the physically pain. Geismar says:

Every time I was doing better, I would do too much. It was hard to be patient. I flipped out about it. I was getting twitching in my calves... At one point I was so nervous about it I stopped walking and thus could hardly function in my life at all. The atrophy from the lack of weight bearing was probably more damaging than the initial tear. It took a lot of courage to start to weight bear on it again... I had a shift in my paradigm of thinking about who I was. I was associated with being hard working, pushing so hard. Drastic Action, {my dance company} was high impact. It is hard to be gentle with close to a 40-year old body. I had a big crisis, I thought I would stop dancing, and experienced a big loss of confidence. My love {of dance} was more powerful than my frustrations, but it was a life altering injury.²¹⁸

Peggy Baker, on the other hand, has suffered numerous injuries throughout her dance career, particularly after reaching her forties, however had acquired no injuries

²¹⁶ Blandine Calais-Germain, *Anatomy of Movement*...136.

²¹⁷ Aviva Geismar

²¹⁸ Aviva Geismar

from her yoga practice. When I asked Peggy Baker if she had ever been injured, she laughed and explained how coming to dance at a late age and approaching it with abandon and high energy made her particularly susceptible for many injuries. She gave me her “short list” that included areas such as intermittent back and lower back pain, subluxation of the right knee (first occurred prior to dance, at age 16), three knee surgeries (all meniscus tears), torn calves, partially dislocated shoulder (3 times), neck out, rib out, right foot bunion, and multiple sprained ankles, once so badly it was put in a cast (this was in 1979 or 80 – when the treatment was very different).

Baker explained how coming to dance later in her teens set her up for injury, particularly because her level of enthusiasm was not equally matched with technique, and there was also a great deal of catching up to do. In her early years of training, for instance, she attempted to increase her rotation in the hips by flattening the lumbar spine (retracting the pelvis) among other things, which undoubtedly contributed to her repeated knee pathology. Later in her career it has been the process of aging that has increased her injury level once again.

I was a very wild dancer when I was young, because I came to dance technique quite late; it was easier to get injured. I was highly energized without a high skill level. Now at 53, and for the last 10 years, it is more wear and tear, arthritic changes, cartilage.²¹⁹

When asked if she was hypermobile, Peggy Baker responded that she did not feel this was true in all areas, but agreed that her feet, shoulders, and cervical spine, and fingers were. On the other hand, she felt limited by the range of motion available in her hip joints, and noted that her legs did not flex and lift as high as she would have liked. In addition, there were certain areas of the spine that had markedly less mobility (such as in

²¹⁹ Peggy Baker

the thoracic and lumbar spine) than her cervical spine. When there are isolated areas that are hypermobile one often has neighboring hypomobile joints. This is common in the spine, for instance, at the point between the various curvatures of the spine, as the concavity moves to the convexity and so on, due to the orientation of the facets in the respective areas.²²⁰

One common area of injury is to the junction of the superior most lumbar spine (L1) and the inferior most thoracic spine (T12). This is partly so because the lumbar spine, which is not designed for rotational purposes, is wed to the thoracic spine, an area that facilitates a great deal of spinal rotation, but a larger reason for the tension is that it is here that the spinal curve changes direction, thus making it a flashpoint for axial stresses during movement. One can see how vulnerable the hypo-mobile area of the lumbar spine at L1 is due to the radical mobility of T12, which is also not connected to the ribs, and therefore the most mobile of the thoracic spine in the transverse plane.²²¹ This vulnerability is accentuated because the curve at that point in the spine is less available to absorb stresses.²²²

As with Peggy Baker, many dancers feel that overall they are hypermobile only in comparison with the general population. For instance, when asked to describe her range of motion, Baker opined that she was “mid-range” for a dancer. Our own perception of hypermobility is often in relation to the people around us, and may not signal the need for greater joint support within the context of an individual’s career. For some it is not until we step back and assess the overall pattern of injuries that one can see with greater

²²⁰ Blandine Calais-Germain, *Anatomy of Movement...*

²²¹ Blandine Calais-Germain, *Anatomy of Movement...*

²²² George Russell, D.C.

clarity, and therefore take measures to prevent the repetition involved in further joint injury due to the deep neuromuscular patterning. It is vital that dancer and teacher work closely together in order to gain objectivity about this area, since with every injury the body is compromised, and to varying degrees permanently, due to the weakened surrounding structure.

Now teaching at the National Ballet of Canada, Baker additionally notices that her students are increasingly and exceedingly hypermobile now, and that they are chosen for their affinity to the ballet aesthetic.²²³ Andra Corvino has also discovered this change of aesthetic through her teaching at the Juilliard School of Dance. She sees dancers adapting to the changing needs of the times in terms of flexibility and agility:

Certain forms of the art are very difficult, difficult. Ballet is very difficult, preternaturally difficult; you have to be a special animal to do it. I see bodies adapting to this extreme {that has become the norm} – even without training. It's almost like genetic – with every decade people are born with more predisposition to be able to do some of the weird things that people are asking for – There are some things that I see people doing with their bodies, and I wonder if the body is meant to do that... These hyper-mobile, multitude turner people. Whacka-do, jumping: everything is so extreme now.²²⁴

Corvino felt that although it was still possible to have spiritual and musical abandon without the nature of extremity, that there was an important distinction between the hyper-mobile and facile dancer. Her goal as a teacher is to ground her students, to enable the dancer to facilitate that range of motion with a great deal of stability and wisdom.

Now I'm teaching these kids... They are looking for more and more facile bodies – very different between a hypermobile, and a facile body. The hypermobile body can do freakish things, but is easily injured. A facile body has its own intelligence, and can learn even more intelligence about how to use it in a healthy and expressive way. So I'm constantly looking at that, because there is so much pressure to learn more and more and do all these wild and crazy things...I try to

²²³ Peggy Baker

²²⁴ Andra Corvino

ground them, and tell them if you keep doing that ...you may not be able to do that much longer. {I teach them} To be sound, and to be wise. It's very nice to see their facility, its lovely. But you want to make sure that they are well balanced, and have that emotional and mental fortitude to deal with this...²²⁵

Certainly over time we develop savvy about our tendencies, but I believe it can be very difficult to sort out the feedback that we get from our habitual patterns based on our neuromuscular patterning. Somatic disciplines and yoga practice can offer a place to learn to discern between what feels right as it connects to the structure of the body. Relying on the physical sensation alone can be misleading, and is not a powerful enough tool with which to alter deep neuromuscular re-patterning.

Often the cause for this injury is a direct result from the repetitive nature of dance itself coupled with the willful determination of the dancer and muscular imbalance. Long time friend, dancer, and teacher Ernesta Corvino told a story about her early dance career that beautifully illustrates how the desire to dance can powerfully overshadow decisions made about whether to work through or tend to an injury. When asked to describe her history of injuries and limitations, Corvino described how devastating it was to develop tendonitis at the onset of her professional career, and how her decision to work through the pain led to putting a halt to the dancing altogether for a time, and having to confront the fear of never dancing again:

I had a very major one {injury} early in my career. I was 20, and doing a lot of pointe work...and I had developed tendonitis of the right ankle. Instead of resting, I had ambitions...I actually accelerated my career and I took one of the most dangerous jobs in New York City at the time, full time at Radio City Music Hall ballet with four shows a day, seven days a week...on a cement stage. After a couple of years and increasing pain I had to stop completely. I thought my career was over... many people at the time said it was going to get better now, if you rest it..., and some suggested that I go back to school. But I was all consumed with

²²⁵ Andra Corvino

dancing, I couldn't do anything...I was paralyzed. At that age it was devastating. I really didn't know if I would be ok again.²²⁶

At that point Ernesta Corvino sought help from an osteopath - as well as many different treatments. A well-known dance chiropractor, Dr. Rose Smart, determined through movement analysis that the course of the problem was in Corvino's back and was due to a musculoskeletal imbalance, thus facilitating both full recovery and enabling Corvino to better utilize her facility.

Any structural imbalance is going to deliver a series of chain reactions throughout the body due to the nature of interconnectivity within the body, which is a closed system. Kinesiologist Sally Fitt describes how the same structural imbalance (such as a leg length variance) will manifest itself in a variety of patterns unique to an individual, and are accentuated in moving. This knowledge can be enormously helpful in preventing further imbalance, as well as maintaining overall health within the structural limitations.²²⁷

Corvino is quick to point out how lucky she was, that the majority of her injuries were limited to structural and muscular imbalance and overuse, tendonitis as opposed to ligamentous, and that her mesomorphic²²⁸ body type also played into the puzzle.

My major painful injuries ...were all tendonitis. Luckily I never tore anything that created such damage that showed up on X rays or an MRI {magnetic resonance imaging}...no surgery...All were overuse injuries coming from muscular imbalance. I have strong muscles, very sensitive, that fire very easily. That's a double edged sword - it makes me a very dynamic dancer, and strong, but I do have one leg shorter than the other, ...that caused muscular imbalances...in conjunction with the quick fire muscles {and this} has left me predisposed to inflamed tendons, from the overused muscle.²²⁹

²²⁶ Ernesta Corvino

²²⁷ Sally Sevey Fitt, *Dance Kinesiology*...238.

²²⁸ Mesomorph: solid, square, muscled, athletic, cardiovascular and muscular efficiency, denser, tightly sprung, strong, great capacity for endurance when active. (See: Chapter five, *The Integral Role of Body Type*).

²²⁹ Ernesta Corvino

Despite the structural limitations and overuse injuries, she has utilized her compact body, high contractile power, incredibly fast reflexes, good visceral connection and inner ear that have facilitated her ability to jump and turn, stay connected physically and emotionally as a passionate dancer. Like many other mesomorph body types however, her tightly knit back is compact and good for turning, but also not as flexible as many other dancers. Ernesta Corvino commented that she believed the structural imbalances would have been far more debilitating without the good training that she had, and that she would be prone to this her whole life since the imbalance is actually structural.

And balancing, of course the training...In this training {Corvino training}....the understanding that it is pure alignment ...the ability to not fight the forces of nature like gravity...can definitely be trained...²³⁰

Corvino went on to note that it is possible to train the instinct right out of a dancer, particularly when alignment, gravity, and physics are not taught as fundamental principles.

Balance

One of the frustrations for many dancers is knowing when to back off, and when to dance through an injury, understanding whether action or inaction will create better odds for the career. For instance, when I was just turning 30, and entering full time work with Momix, I suffered my worst knee injury that I had had to date. I decided to dance through the injury, basing my decision on the fact that the door might close on my career if I were to take the time to heal – the job would be somebody else's, and at the time I

²³⁰ Ernesta Corvino

was the newest, and one of the older members of the company. I was afraid that would be it, my career would be over before it had really gotten started. Many elements of my decision were well thought out and were true, however I had not considered the following ramifications: that a knee injury equates a lack of stability and is therefore very hard to hide, and that the fact that my speed, agility, ability to jump and run and improvise was deeply impaired and therefore rendered minimally useful to the company. Nor did I realize the psychological impact of being seen as a weak or lazy dancer, and in knowing that my decision to perform through the injury was a burden on my fellow dancers in that I still needed to “carry my own weight” on an unstable foundation. Not surprisingly, my research exposed others who had similar difficult decisions and repercussions surrounding injury and their dance career.²³¹

Due to Leslie Kaminoff’s long time experience with teaching yoga to dancers, he has acquired some amazing stories over the years concerning the incredible work ethic that dancers so often take to insane extremes. In this case, Kaminoff tells of a wonderful story of how one of his clients, Christine Sarry, chose to dance despite the fact that she had a broken foot:

Christine Sarry was a beautiful dancer, with amazing jumps, that landed very softly. She had amazing suspension, and had very quick feet. She danced with everyone: ABT, Joffrey, Elliot Feld, and she became a client of mine at what turned out to be the end of her career. She had never missed a show due to injury. Never. I actually saw her dance with a broken foot. I told her: “you could have this X rayed, but is it going to make a difference? Are you going to not dance on it because it is broken?”²³²

Kaminoff has seen this kind of brute professionalism before. Back when he was dancing as a supernumerary in a celebration of Fokine at the Metropolitan Opera, he

²³¹ Christina Maria Adelhardt

²³² Leslie Kaminoff

performed in some of the greatest productions of all time, alongside the greatest dancers of the time, and witnessed some of the most interesting pieces of dance history. During the ballet *La Sylphide*, for example, in the double partnering section with Anthony Dowell and Cynthia Harvey; Harvey broke her foot mid-ballet. Kaminoff tells of the incredible feat of professionalism and athleticism that took place that evening on that stage, and how all but a few people in the audience had no idea as to what had just occurred.

I've seen unbelievable acts of professionalism in dancers, on stage. Which is quite apart from their ability to perform. I was supering {a supernumerary} in *Petroushka* with ABT {American Ballet Theatre} once, it was an all Fokine evening, on stage at the MET {Metropolitan Opera}, and they dragged out all the old costumes, they did the finale from *Firebird*, there's just a big – not a dance step, just a costume parade, poor Anthony Dowell was just standing there with nothing to do. But then, later in that same program he was doing *La Sylphide* – the double partnering with the two-ballerina piece – Cynthia Harvey broke her foot in the middle of it. She exited in the wings with Dowell - the other girl didn't know what was going on – She said: “I can't do this, this, and this, on the right foot”, so he said “fine”, and he went out and changed everything he was doing with Harvey, and the other dancer had no idea – and all but 10 people in the audience had no idea what was going on. Then she went out, took the bows, she fell down and crashed. That's a dancer. That was something! I'd never seen anything like that. Were it to happen in any piece – but one where you have to deal with two ballerinas at once. That was Dowell, and he was quite old then; it was towards the end of his career.²³³

At times discipline can become confused with compulsive overdoing. Since the moment of performance is so fleeting, so temporal, and so driven by adrenaline, there is an underlying urgency to excel. There is a saying that sums up the necessary and typical work ethic “if you don't use it, you lose it.” But how does one balance the drive to perfection, and at what point does this characteristic become toxic? Judith Hanson

²³³ Leslie Kaminoff

Lasater described how the difficulties that she encountered in her yogic journey had been created by a confusion of ambition and discipline.

The difficulties have all been created by not listening enough to what was arising in me, and confusing ambition and discipline. And I am seeing now if I can learn that discipline means more about consistency.²³⁴

This aspect of self-discovery and practice is one of extreme importance for the dancer. I believe that it has to do with clarity of intention, compassionate awareness, and trusting the teacher within. As previously discussed, this appears to be a muddy area within many formal dance traditions, when the student is not encouraged to question what they are taught, and are expected to keep quiet, and honor the old adage of “don’t think, do”. Lasater offers an alternative perspective, a means to navigate, by trying to learn now to practice from a place of deep listening and spaciousness, rooted in curiosity and fun, fluidity, and grace.

So sometimes I do a lot less than I used to do, sometimes not, sometimes I can do less and I just feel so good. I want to create a space in which my practice can change - and not to believe that it has to stay the same. I ask myself: “What is really alive in me right now?” What do I need, what does my body think I need right now? Do I need to ... really challenge myself right now, or do I need to rest...?²³⁵

Just recently I was reminded of the importance of listening to the body when I overheard a student crying in the lobby of the dance space. She had just injured herself in class, had been working really hard and blamed herself for her injury. She was crying as much in anger toward herself as in pain. At what point does pushing surpass the necessary requirements of self-discipline and much needed challenge that are necessary for growth?

²³⁴ Judith Hanson Lasater

²³⁵ Judith Hanson Lasater

I have found this to be key in my own personal growth, as well as a wonderful guidepost in my teaching. I recall one tour in Aspen while working in Momix I was publicly rewarded by the director for my incredible work ethic. It was the biggest compliment that I had thus far received from him, and one of the rare acknowledgements that he was pleased with my work. I remember the realization as it dawned on me that the compliment, although well earned, was not on the actual product, but rather on the work ethic, or in other words, the endless pushing. I have found yoga to be incredibly helpful in finding a counter pose to all of the pushing I had done for so many years in the field of dance. The self-discipline had brought me success in many ways, had fulfilled my dreams of becoming a dancer, but it did not bring me happiness, or even the feeling of mastery.

Andrea Feier describes how her teacher's method of tempering this dancer and cultural phenomenon has assisted her recovery from her own tendency to overdo. Rama Birch chooses to pare down the quantity of poses and extend the duration so as to allow for repose and reflection rather than sheer achievement:

Rama Birch keeps taking poses out, realizing that it doesn't do anything for people, its just for their minds... in our culture, which is so goal oriented ...her style {Master Yoga} is a balance for our lifestyle. In Hawaii, or India - they might need their fire lit. It makes total sense to me. My personality type is GO – Go – Go – try harder, push harder...This style is the opposite: do less, allow more, surrender more, BE. ...The kind of yoga I did in New York sort of fed into what I did.²³⁶

This tendency to go overboard with enthusiasm and become a dance dictator is described as “wanting mind” and portrayed by the character the Hungry Ghost in *A Path With Heart*, written by Jack Kornfield. This ghost, whose mouth is the size of a pinhole,

²³⁶ Andrea Feier

has an appetite that is unquenchable; his stomach is that of a bottomless pit. He is eternally hungry and can never be satiated, because the appetite for *more* can never be satiated. There is always more to desire once something is acquired or achieved, and for the dancer there is always more to do.²³⁷ Although we reach the heights of our career by our drive and discipline, it is vital to understand the balance of *tapas*, or heat, with that of *tamas*, grounded-ness, and *sattva*, or peace, the balance of *abhyasa* (discipline) and *vairagya* (surrender).

I remember Andra Corvino illustrating this point in a class over a decade ago. She relayed that an arabesque does not only consist of the physical effort of contraction, holding, or tension, but also must imbibe a softness, in order to avoid a brittle appearance. An arabesque is a “smile” that creates an arc by moving in more than one direction and thereby creating a dynamic relationship of balance. An arabesque cannot be all back or all leg, there must be a balance in the overall shape and intrinsic expression:

In regard to balance, it’s my feeling that the upper body has to take as much space forward and up as the foot that carries the leg has to take space back and up.²³⁸

This sense of balance is reflected within the synergy of muscles. For example, the muscles of the back contract to bring the back into extension, in tandem with the abdominal muscles, which must, in turn, lengthen. The muscle pairs harmoniously provide stability and mobility. When there is an imbalance, however, the body is no longer able to operate at its most efficient capacity.

B.K.S. Iyengar describes this balance as beginning at the cellular level. He speaks of integration as a journey that includes the breath, the body, the senses and mind,

²³⁷ Jack Kornfield, *A Path With Heart: A Guide Through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life* (Bantam Books, 1993).

²³⁸ Andra Corvino

intelligence as well as integration of the self (atma-samyama) with all of existence.²³⁹

Once this level of integration occurs, the yogi taps into the wellspring of the infinite: “the potency of nature flows abundantly.”²⁴⁰ Iyengar also describes this muscular imbalance as an act of violence for both the overused body part as well as the dormant, and he equates this state of being as unethical, lacking in ahimsa.

Suppose that in performing an asana you are stretching more on the right side and less on the left. An unethical state is setting into your body. There is violence on the right side where you are stretching more...It is a deliberate violence because you are overstretching...Though it may appear non-violent (on the left), it is also violence as the cells will die when they do not perform their functions as they should. One side thus manifests deliberate violence, and the other side non-deliberate violence.²⁴¹

Thus, according to Iyengar, balance and integration equates and produces an act of non-violence.

I realize now just how my rajassic approach to dance served me with limited rewards, the shadow lurking behind my determination was overdoing, burnout, and injuries. Mix that with hyper-mobile joints, symbolically and literally suggesting a lack of support and form and it is not surprising to learn that I faced many joint injuries to my right knee. The first time Judith Hanson Lasater came to me in Supta Padangusthasana (hand to foot pose, or leg split while lying on the floor) and lowered the angle of my leg by at least a foot I was utterly confused. Now I can appreciate the added richness in all of those unexplored spaces between, and the value of supporting my balanced structure rather than promoting increased instability. Years later I am translating that understanding as a teacher of both dance and yoga.

²³⁹ B.K. S. Iyengar, *Tree of Yoga* (Boston: Shambhala, 1989), 48.

²⁴⁰ B.K. S. Iyengar, *Tree of Yoga...*

²⁴¹ B.K. S. Iyengar, *Tree of Yoga...* 50

I am speaking about the crucial role of balance - as a dancer - a manifold image that could span from mind to body and spirit alike, the seed of which is found in the dance of muscle pairs such as the biceps and triceps - providing a foundation of give and take, support and space, and also within the breath. This perfect balance is miraculously found in a single breath cycle. Too much holding equates tension, and how many of us have confused holding the breath for effort? The simple action of breathing creates the very state of balance and deep listening that, although it is vital to the dancer, is far more reaching in the scheme of overall health. It is obvious that the dancer needs to maintain his or her body not just for a career, but for a lifetime of moving and living.

Donna Farhi describes just how deeply we are affected (body, mind, and spirit) by paying attention to our life force, or prana, as she describes how the body is nourished and replenished with a single breath.

When the diaphragm moves in the luxurious expansions that mark full breathing, all these organs are massaged, rolled, churned, and bathed in new blood, fluids, and oxygen. The organs get squeezed and released like sponges. Breathing stimulates all of the body to work better, and this is why it has such a profound affect on our wellbeing. Subjectively this free movement in the inner body also allows for communication between the rationale/thinking aspect of ourselves and our instinctual/animal nature.²⁴²

Just as deep listening alters perception and experience as a student, so it is true as a teacher. What Farhi speaks of is the communication that takes place on the most profound level, invaluable for dance or yoga teacher alike, particularly when using tactile methods of teaching. Because teaching with touch requires a trusting relationship in order for it to feel safe and effective, it is of utmost importance for the teacher to be

²⁴² Donna Farhi. *The Breathing Book: Good Health and Vitality Through Essential Breath Work* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1996), 53.

extremely clear about his or her intentions when it comes to manual adjustments or feedback.

A hidden sexual agenda, arrogance, and inexperience are all possible reasons as to why inappropriate touching might occur. Peter Rutter, M.D. discusses how important it is for a strong ethical code to prevail any relationship that offers an imbalance of power. The fact is that students are often willing to put their yoga teacher on a pedestal. Rutter explores the psychological dynamic of teacher to student, therapist or doctor to patient, lawyer to client, and pastor to congregation, and states that there is a degree of transference and therefore imbalance of power that renders this relationship inappropriate for sexual innuendo, demand, or consummation.²⁴³ Due to the many citations of inappropriate sexual conduct within a dance or yoga class (or community); the requirement of reading and discussing *Sex in the Forbidden Zone* for yoga teacher training certification is vital for boundary and ethical conduct clarification.

One can be a conduit for teaching and healing only when one is clear of all personal agenda, and deeply available to the information that is occurring in the present moment as well as past experience. Ana Forrest discusses how she assesses a student prior to touch:

I first look at the student, noting any areas that show a general dullness, weakened muscle tone, or diminished vitality. Then I look deeper and see, for example, that a certain set of nerves seem irritated.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Peter Rutter, M.D. *Sex in the Forbidden Zone: When Men in Power – Therapists, Doctors, Clergy, Teachers, and Others – Betray Women’s Trust* (Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1989), 10-11.

²⁴⁴ Ana Forrest, interview by Jennifer Barrett, *The Trouble with Touch*, *Yoga Journal* (April 2003) : 178.

Although many choose to avoid teaching with touch for a variety of reasons, there are some, like Forrest, who feel it is part of their gift to the student. Donna Farhi is another such teacher, who has learned how to gather information by listening to the feedback given from her use of touch:

When you've touched thousands of people, you literally gather information in your hands. This is how a masterful teacher can touch someone's hand and immediately know there's a problem with the shoulder.²⁴⁵

Irene Dowd, someone who is well known throughout the dance world for her ability to read bodies, elaborates on this act of "seeing" with the hands in her book *Taking Root to Fly*:

The entire surface of my palm, including my fingertips, acts like a retina that has grown and is still growing from my brain, along my spinal cord, through my arms, to the skin of my hands. The surface of the skin of the other person is like a transparent cornea through which my retina/hand "looks" to see the space contained within that other person. Within the boundaries of the other person's skin lies a complex and varied landscape, a self-regulating ecosystem composed of interacting bone, muscle, fascia, nerve, blood, organs, and glandular cells... Each sensory nerve cell in my hand that is in contact with the other person's skin is functioning like a rod or cone, transforming the light into nerve impulses which continue to travel all the way through the central axis of my arm, back into my spinal cord and into my brain which integrates and turns these impulses into a picture of that other person's body landscape.²⁴⁶

Thus, it is possible to see the validity in using tactile teaching, as well as discretion. Jennifer Barrett, author of the article *The Trouble with Touch* offers the following suggestions for providing inner clarity when using therapeutic touch: ask permission to touch the student, enter a state of gratitude, check your intentions prior to

²⁴⁵ Donna Farhi, interview by Jennifer Barrett, *The Trouble with Touch*, Yoga Journal (April 2003) : 178.

²⁴⁶ Irene Dowd, *Taking Root to Fly: Articles on Functional Anatomy*, 3d ed. (G&H SOHO, 1998), 70.

touching, listen to your student, and clear your mind of domineering, judgmental, or amorous thoughts.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ Jennifer Barrett, *The Trouble with Touch*, Yoga Journal (April 2003) : 106-107.

CHAPTER VI

YOGA BENEFITS: THE DANCE BEHIND THE EYELIDS

How yoga has affected dance and teaching:

Beyond a doubt this was my favorite question to ask: In what way has yoga benefited you? I was so curious to discover what other dancer/yogis had experienced as benefits in their field of work, study, and personal lives. The difficulty for me has not been in finding enough material for this section, but rather in consolidating the many aspects that came to light in a succinct manner. I will begin with my own journey.

There have been countless times when yoga has literally gotten me back up on my feet. The first time was in 1995, when I was taking a break from Momix after a particularly challenging tour fraught with stressful company dynamics such as I had not experienced to that point in time. I found my way to a yoga class taught by Susan Braham, dancer, choreographer, teacher, and yogini. Her class was a watershed experience for me, and I quickly developed a very serious self-practice that has continued ever since. I had the feeling that I was in exactly the right place at exactly the right time. The result was an immediate, body/mind/spirit boost to my career and life. I was aware of enhanced balance, strength and stamina in my dancing, and also the stirring of a new calm and creativity that began to surface from within.

Yoga quickly became my anchor, a means to stay grounded in my career and also understand and survive several deep disappointments and challenges of life – the loss of a deep friend and first marriage, the uprooting of old systems of learning and doing that had lost their usefulness, letting go of a dance career and finding it again in a new way –

this time as a mother, having a child, a new marriage, multiple moves, return to school and career changes all in a short span of time. Those first years of practice yoga gave me the means to survive the off-the-chart levels of stress from so many changes in a condensed period of time. Later came other challenges, including family illness and the loss of two babies, one of which was especially devastatingly sad and hard. And this is not to mention the every day pangs of growth and stress that can become so very consuming.

In short, yoga has given me the tools to maneuver in rocky and still waters, the means to accept the things that I could not change, and work with that which I could. I attribute my yoga practice to providing both stability and flexibility clearly seen on the physical level, and felt on the emotional and spiritual. Yoga continues to challenge me, to fulfill dreams, and heal old wounds such as with my former dance company – by overcoming the image of the injured dancer, and freeing the creative voice in me that had become silent as the result of lack of support, perspective, and health. Most importantly, my practice continues to light the way into the future. I am so grateful for the gradual emergence of the teacher within, and the relief of rebalancing discipline with surrender. When everything was falling apart around me in my life, there was a steady stream of yoga.

Last summer I had the opportunity to meet with my first yoga teacher, Susan Braham, over lunch in Brooklyn for an interview. I was amazed at how quickly the hour and a half together flew, how little and how much had passed between us in the 11 years – how many formative experiences for myself. But most of all I was stunned by how many of the dancers that I had interviewed had been first introduced to yoga through her

classes. It was easy to see why meeting with Braham had been so transformative – I have always felt her to be grounded, supportive, and spacious at the same time. I loved how she described how yoga had become the foundation for her life.

But more over all, I have the sense that yoga is the river that I am riding on in life. And sometimes the river goes over rocks, sometimes on a hot summer day there is no movement, sometimes there is a downpour of fresh rain into the river. And the yoga is something that stays steady with me. And by yoga I mean the practice of it: the asanas, the breathing and the meditation – becomes some of the foundation of life, and life is ever-changing and I think that is why the image of a river becomes the foundation rather than a house or building as a foundation.²⁴⁸

Within the context of a dancer's life a deep and fluid foundation of yoga can provide the basis for both tenacity as well as capacity. A dancer needs balance for the endless hours, years, and even decades of effort and dedicated practice (tapas) that is required for training, seeking/creating jobs, as well as performing and the numerous other hats that we wear as choreographers/fund raisers/producers... One must also tap into the fluidity of surrendering to the moment, to being soft and pliable and vulnerable enough to roll with the punches and remain available for compassionate response. For me, evolving with yoga as a steady stream of continuity throughout life is a lovely analogy that goes hand in hand with attaining balance of the three gunas²⁴⁹: the hot rajassic effort required, the ability to remain grounded physically, in reality and in practicality (tamas), and the sattva, the peace of mind that allows us to let go in the moment to what is, get a good night's sleep, replenish and nourish ourselves and remain available to use our physical vessel as a means of expression.

Canadian dancer, choreographer, and teacher Peggy Baker began studying yoga at Sivananda, a place that has traditionally been open to the disabled. At the time she and

²⁴⁸ Susan Braham

²⁴⁹ Tamini...171: II - 18

her partner, who had multiple sclerosis, were looking for things to do together. One of the things that she found was so appealing was how accessible and uncomplicated this form of yoga was (there was very little use of props).

The simplicity grabbed me right off the bat, the physical experience, and just spatially, the fact that you didn't need anything but your time was beautiful and inviting. I find props interesting, but their use feels more like exercise, and I wasn't looking for more exercise to do. The experience grabbed me.²⁵⁰

Although there were many aspects about these early yoga classes that were appealing, it wasn't until Baker utilized her yoga practice leading up to and recovering from a meniscus injury that she experienced a spiritual level that was on par with her dance experience.

Quickly after I started going (to yoga), the next winter, I tore my meniscus when I slipped on an icy sidewalk. I had to have surgery, and I did yoga up to surgery and during rehabilitation. I was able to connect to the spiritual level that I was used to achieving in my dancing: a feeling of speaking with my own voice, or in the grain of my body – a feeling which I had *only* ever experienced dancing...I was able to connect with through my yoga practice. It was really important to me on an emotional level to feel that I could go to that place of physical, emotional integration. That has really been one of the most appealing aspects of the whole thing for me.²⁵¹

This coupled with the physical benefits from the asanas was enough to quickly create time and space for a committed practice during those years.

Baker described the physical benefits as inner changes that are tangible energy shifts, very different from the exercises she had experienced in rehabilitation.

Of course, the extreme nature of the poses, it feels really good. For me it feels really good as I settle into the postures, then after I come out of it you can feel the change that you've gone through...its a very positive change – of feeling more open, or elongated, or more released, or there's more flow...Its very, very different for me with exercises. I have had to do a lot of exercises for rehab; I've had three knee surgeries, and coming back from especially my shoulder. You

²⁵⁰ Peggy Baker

²⁵¹ Peggy Baker

have to do all this repetition with therabands and weights... – I don't enjoy doing that work, it doesn't make me feel good, I just endure it.²⁵²

The physical attraction makes sense, keeping in mind the initial attraction for dance that Baker had shared with me. The aspect of deepening physical awareness mingled with the profound reverence that can be felt from a serious studio was far more intriguing than a gym-like atmosphere, where emphasis (akin to our popular culture) is on the body beautiful and perky outfits.

In yoga I don't feel like I am exercising. I really liked the ashram – the people were deeply committed and had a spiritual practice that went with their yoga, and even though I don't have that per se, I really appreciated learning it from someone who had that deep connection into it. And I think in a lot of other studios that I see now where you can go and take yoga, its very much a physical thing, its sort of a more exercise or body {focus, as opposed to}... I don't know, what cute little yoga outfits you're wearing. I'm not doing it for, like I said exercise, there's something else that captures me about it.²⁵³

One of the benefits that came first and foremost was the focus on the breathing. Baker has found that this aspect has really enhanced her teaching, and she has consciously introduced these elements into all avenues of her work.

Another area of attraction for Peggy Baker that was similar in both dance and yoga was the ritualistic aspect. She loved the correlation of some of the basic floor work of Martha Graham to the seated asanas of Hatha Yoga, such as the pretzel sit in the Graham technique and the spinal twists of yoga.

Those poses have resonance into my dance life. I liked going back to those primary shapes again. I also enjoyed the ritual attached to yoga and dance technique. That was a lot of my pleasure in Graham technique: always doing things in the same order reminded me of Graham. Sitting or standing, poses on floor – there are possibilities of variation, but related to this one seated posture,

²⁵² Peggy Baker

²⁵³ Peggy Baker

the cross - legged sit. I already had some references to those shapes in my life; they had more meaning.²⁵⁴

Others, like Sara Rudner and Peggy Gould also spoke of their appreciation for the deep underlying tradition that makes the system of yoga so complete. Peggy Gould, dancer, choreographer, anatomist and yoga practitioner, spoke of how this old tradition has informed her work by creating discipline and space for herself.

Yoga has been practiced for millennia, and the level of development and possibility is very inspiring and informative. It encourages discipline and creativity. The way that my yoga training has been structured makes space and time to put attention on to one's self.²⁵⁵

Since we had studied together years ago with Christine Wright, both Gould and I had become interested in the practice of yoga. Gould has enjoyed delving into a form that has so much history and archetypal value, comparing the lineage of yoga to that of the younger, yet also comprehensive science of ballet. When she is asked to substitute for yoga classes she goes straight to the source, *Light on Yoga*.

According to Mr. Iyengar in *Light on Yoga*, the yogi assumes the form of many life forms - not all living creatures: the triangle, mountain, dog, sage, warrior. In my experience, all are a way to engage myself with these long standing traditions of human accomplishment and ways of understanding the world around us. Ballet has had several 100 years to develop (during the time of Leonardo Da Vinci), and consequently the cataloguing of what we've got is so thorough, so comprehensive you feel the benefits of what has been organized...²⁵⁶

Gould didn't find benefits in all forms of yoga, however. Her experience in astanga yoga was that the athleticism overshadowed the deeper potential of integration:

{My experience was that astanga had} an emphasis on the movement/athletic aspect of the practice which hampered my ability to connect to the totality of the practice as something more than exercise, thereby missing the true benefit of going deeper and developing a practice including and rooted in the ancient source

²⁵⁴ Peggy Baker

²⁵⁵ Peggy Gould

²⁵⁶ Peggy Gould

material. On the other hand, the chanting, and reading provided more of a springboard: I am very moved by the Sanskrit readings and chanting. The use of OM has been wonderful, the integration of voice, tone and spirit.²⁵⁷

This gift of quietude cannot be underestimated. In a time when there is rampant insomnia, constant levels of stress, and a multitude of diseases that come from the subsequent weakened immune system, yoga can provide our culture in our time the opportunity to practice the sweetness of surrender and the resultant physical and emotional health.

For Rebecca Hansen, a ballet dancer and teacher who practices in South Dakota, this was most certainly the case. Although she had not been studying yoga for very long when we spoke, she had noticed a profound shift in her sense of well - being. Thursdays, her marathon day, included her newly acquired yoga class, a quick lunch, and teaching classes back to back from 4 – 8:30pm. All this activity was typically in conjunction with a battle of insomnia the night before due to anticipation of the Thursday workload. After her first yoga class, five different people (not knowing that she had taken this class) told her that she looked so peaceful and rested! Hansen states that the benefits have spanned from a relaxed state of mind, the endorphin high, a sense of completion, and a feeling of being cleansed after yoga. She really enjoys that you don't have to push in yoga, and has found that this really challenges her dancer habits!

My old school mentality is being replaced with a healthy mentality. My muscles feel warm and relaxed, and my hip flexors can relax more.²⁵⁸

Daryl Fowkes; has also noticed a shift in thinking and overall mental state that was a result of his yoga practice and journey:

²⁵⁷ Peggy Gould

²⁵⁸ Rebecca Hansen

Yoga has stabilized my emotions, my mind. ... When I sit on a block cross-legged, I know that this is where I need to be – everything else is whipped cream. Yoga doesn't fix anything. Breath open, grounded in self, care free versus care-less. What bothers me is less significant – it doesn't go away, but the relationship has shifted. I deal with {life} more open-hearted versus {thinking of something} as a threat to my being...²⁵⁹

Andra Corvino was another teacher who has deeply altered the course of my life.

When she appeared to teach one of my classes my first year at Juilliard, I remember feeling so grateful that finally someone was speaking about dance in a manner that I could wrap my mind around. The Corvino training is extremely well rounded – a couple of us used to refer to the Corvino's teaching as being the alfalfa sprouts of the ballet community: healthy, sensible, rooted, fresh, and naturally grown. What it came down to for me was that I could understand the information given – it wasn't a correction, but was rather an understanding of the physics, function, or musicality of the movement at hand. I sat with Andra Corvino for our interview at my alma mater, Juilliard. Corvino described one of the major benefits to her as being the quieting effect yoga has on her.

For me it really gets me quiet. It gets my mind quiet; it gets my body tempered to a nice tranquil hum instead of a frantic buzz. I find that I live a very over stimulated existence, and that I don't even realize it. So that is very good for me, and I just sit quietly, and do something that requires my full mind and body, and my breathing. And just let my mind go where it needs to go, and then to sit in meditation, let my thoughts come, let my thoughts go, don't get attached. ...See the steady stream... and to see how deeply I can go and where different experiences will take me, like: What kind of dance I get behind my eyelids.²⁶⁰

Beyond the inner dance, yoga has also provided Corvino with a fresh look to a technique that has become second nature. After years of engraining the routine of becoming a dancer, and living the role of dancer, the muscles learn to support that role in life in a very particular way. Yoga can become a radical means of sorting through old

²⁵⁹ Daryl Fowkes

²⁶⁰ Andra Corvino

habits and deeply encoded programs, enabling the dancer to work deeply and subtly on layers that are not easily accessible.

I have been dancing for so long, in doing my dance routine, sequences, enchainment, my steps for so long that sometimes I don't see them freshly...So that I think when I do something I am not used to I have a clearer picture of it at the moment. Its more – it doesn't have so much history. I don't bring so much baggage with it. Because your muscles have a lot of memory, and if you're doing stuff that you've been doing since childhood - of course it's always a new time - but I think the program is coded in there. It's harder to break patterns...²⁶¹

In addition to the gift of awareness on this very deep physical level, yoga also provided Andra Corvino with a means to add a richness to her spiritual life, deep presence to her dancing as well as an inner peace and grace of gravity.

Yoga gave me an opportunity to do something that was physical and something spiritual that was new. Because I don't do it every day, and it still remains newer to me than my connection with practicing my dancing - which gets better. Dancing gets better with yoga, because it just opens up pathways that allow me to access and relate to my experience in yoga and to relate it to standing up and into my dancing...²⁶²

Staying present to what is arising in that moment can be a particular challenge for dancers as they move into, through, and beyond the prime of their dancing. Many dancers suffer a great series of losses as the limitations of the body become more pronounced, and the intensity of the myriad possibilities of youth and means from which to soar shrink in accordance to aging. My husband, Mark Santillano, is a virtuoso former dancer with Pilobolus. He and I have created a number of works collaboratively in our own dance company, SoMar Dance Works. Our work in SoMar has been our means to continue to perform and choreograph alongside of our teaching duties at Mercyhurst College and involvement with community dance. We are aware that our repertory will

²⁶¹ Andra Corvino

²⁶² Andra Corvino

someday need to adapt to our changing bodies. Pieces that involve a great deal of lifting or knee work will eventually need to be modified or given to younger dancers. Indeed, what path our lives continue to take will directly relate to how we respond to our changing selves and our world. As our experiences grow, enrich, and widen our perspectives, so must our paradigm of beauty and balance as we continue to use this medium of expression.

Even if a dancer chooses to let go of the performance entirely, there is still the practical need for teaching a technique that is based on physical prowess, continual challenges and exploratory research that involves moving to and from the floor with speed, grace, and dexterity. The troublesome issue of longevity and mobility that lurks beneath the surface of our existence remains ever present. The realization that our chosen path, a career in a highly athletic form of modern dance, necessitates the use of our body through demonstration – particularly in the exploration and creation required of new work. At the very least yoga can remain a tool for dancing through the process of aging by remaining strong and pliable of body and mind, and of peaceful spirit.

Although I sense more changes on the horizon, I remain comforted by other dancers who have chosen to see what was beyond the next corner in their career as well. Letting go of expectations becomes a necessity in our quest for peace if we are to age as gracefully as we desire. Andra Corvino notes how yoga has been a useful tool for this process of letting go and being open to the moment as a dancer.

Getting older and dancing, still it's a very conscious effort for me – not to go into those great expectations – which yoga has taught me to just be, to allow my body to be where my body is right now. It's not about getting my leg higher, or

bending more. Just breath into it, if it feels tight, breath into that – and just let time, let your breathing open things up for you.²⁶³

My mentor and yoga teacher, Judith Hanson Lasater, recently sent me a quote by William James. The quote is a wonderful daily mantra for the aspiring yogini and dancer and reflects the delicate balance of pursuing excellence verses attachment to perfection. “Excellence does not require perfection”. Lasater suggested that not only do we tend to strive for excellence in our practice and teaching, but we can also confuse it with perfection, a static state, and that hinders our ability to access the fluid nature of living and teaching in the present moment.²⁶⁴

I asked Lasater what benefits she had received from her practice, knowing that she had dedicated many decades to her practice, and had heard bits and pieces of her story throughout the years of experiencing a teacher/mentor relationship with her. She was able to break her answer down into bite size pieces that included the categories of physical, emotional/psychological, and spiritual benefits. Firstly, the physical aspects had a profound and immediate impact on her life, as within two months of beginning a yoga practice all of her arthritic symptoms that she had experienced as a dancer were gone. She attributed this remarkable shift from the practice of yoga coupled with a change of diet.

Secondly, Lasater remarked on the psychological and emotional changes she experienced due to a change in perspective and lightening of overall mood and temperament:

Psychologically and emotionally it helped me even out my moods. ...And in a way it gave me a certain perspective. I remember very clearly one day after I had

²⁶³ Andra Corvino

²⁶⁴ Judith Hanson Lasater, *Correspondence*.

started to practice yoga. I left work, and I was driving home in my little VW bug. And I was just in a dark mood, I was in a bad mood – I’m not sure why now, but I was in a very bad mood. And I got in the car, and I looked up – and I realized the sky was piercingly blue, it was an autumn day, and the sun was warm and yellow. It was Friday afternoon, I was done with work, I had work that I liked, I had wonderful plans for the weekend – and I just started laughing. And I realized that I had gained some perspective from my practice of yoga. That happiness had a lot to do with my own perception. And that was just a blinding flash of the obvious. ...I think yoga gave me that.²⁶⁵

In addition to the physical and emotional benefits, Lasater went on to say that she experienced a feeling of connectivity and coming home. The attraction was not only to the asana and its effects, but also to the philosophy and yoga writings.

Then finally, from a spiritual perspective – my very first yoga class I rejoiced – I felt that here was someone who knew that movement was sacred. I immediately connected with the wider spiritual context of the practice. I began to read whatever I could get my hands on about yoga, yoga philosophy. It all made sense to me, it all had a sense of recognition, the Sanskrit terms weren’t hard, the whole thing just resonated. It felt like *a recognition*, like I was coming home.²⁶⁶

For Lasater, one of the most valuable benefits has been to remain present in body, mind, and spirit to what is arising in the moment, and learn to discern between ambition and discipline. By coming to the mat with an open, curious mind, Lasater has determined she is better able to address the immediate needs of her body, mind, and spirit.

This is one of the things I think about the practice of asana is that when I get on the mat I am basically taking an inventory every day – physical, emotional, and spiritual inventory. I am taking inventory so if I find an issue with my shoulder (because I had a fall) and I really feel this limitation in my shoulder, and it really helps me know what part of my body needs attention, if I need some extra help from a body work therapist, or a massage therapist, or an acupuncturist. That’s one of the ways I feel yoga keeps you healthy, because you have this chance to pick up on things out of balance when they’re small. That’s how I think of it; it’s like a net that catches these things.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Judith Hanson Lasater

²⁶⁶ Judith Hanson Lasater

²⁶⁷ Judith Hanson Lasater

For Peentz Dubble, yoga initially complemented her dancing by means of enhanced balance, alignment, strength, and concentration. She noticed that her ability to perform and stay very present was increasingly apparent, and that the meditation and resulting quietude brought a deeper awareness of what was going on inside. The Iyengar system has always felt like a good fit for Dubble, due to the emphasis on alignment. It has also enabled her to observe habitual patterns, which therefore further aided her ability to stay injury free.

Since the system is so meticulous, it enhanced my ability to stay out of injury. Prior to yoga, I had chronic back problems - it was often in spasm. I did Rolfing, Feldenkrais, and through the Iyengar alignment, I could see how imbalanced I was, and how dance often encouraged this. Many times I didn't do things on both sides of the body as an improviser. I had movement patterns that I was not aware of. It {the improvising} actually reinforced my weaknesses and my strengths.²⁶⁸

In addition to neutralizing imbalances and learning to prevent the back spasms, the Iyengar yoga studies enabled Dubble to develop a more neutral palate, which ultimately led to the realm of infinite possibilities in many areas including choreography. As a result, she began to let go of her formal dance classes in order to focus with greater attention on yoga and improvising (with Cynthia Novak and Richard Bull). The classes that she did take with Novak were based on Irmgard Bartenieff's somatic applications of Rudolf Von Laban's theories of energy, shape, and time.

As an improviser it {yoga} was a more neutral technique, which was what I wanted, because I didn't want the impressions of various styles of dance anymore... I wanted to be able to have infinite possibilities, and an infinite palate with which to improvise. But I didn't want to have any imprints on me; I wanted to be able to choose freely how to shape my movement. I wanted to also have a technique that felt neutral in terms of style, and yet continued to develop a depth of inner awareness. It {yoga} continued to build strength, it continued to develop

²⁶⁸ Peentz Dubble

flexibility; so all of those things I felt yoga really offered. For me as an improviser it became a perfect, perfect, primary technique.²⁶⁹

Dubble's practice has never remained stagnant, and her approach and interest in dance and yoga have continued to shift and evolve throughout the years. When asked to articulate how her practice has changed, Peentz Dubble equated her yoga journey to a constantly evolving pathway leading to inner and outer calm and clarity.

I think that the benefits are absolutely infinite. And I think that oftentimes we enter yoga from a particular doorway, and for particular reasons, and then we stay with the practice for other reasons. So I feel like that's what happened to me. I entered yoga because I enjoyed the movement style of it, and I saw it as a complement to my dancing, and then it grew into a kind of physical therapy, in terms of how I felt it was helping me to be freer of injury and to be more balanced. I started noticing that in my improvising I felt that I had better balance, I felt that I could move in a more articulate way. I felt like I became a stronger and more articulate dancer. And then I started to notice the difference in my ability to stay in the moment, not to get freaked out if I knew someone was in the audience, or any of those kinds of performance anxieties. I began to feel that I was drawing on skills of mindfulness. I was aware of being centered inside of my self at the same time that I was able to participate and be part of a group. I was really learning how to be the witness, to be inside, and also to be outside, simultaneously. That became of real interest to me.²⁷⁰

Despite the wonderful benefits Dubble had previously experienced in her yoga practice, it was not until she began to study with Patricia Walden (Sr. Iyengar teacher and director of the B.K.S. Iyengar Yoga Mala Institute in Boston) that she began to take a deeper interest in understanding, applying and living the underlying principles of yoga. Dubble describes her association with Patricia Walden as both profound and timely. The confluence of the yoga, sutra study, and community awakened and heightened new levels of life skills, as well as meaning and appreciation for the beauty of human expression and existence.

²⁶⁹ Peentz Dubble

²⁷⁰ Peentz Dubble

And that's where the beauty and work of yoga comes out: When you begin to understand that these are life skills, they are skills to really help us live our full potential, and to bring forth that beauty and grace, and divine spirit within you.²⁷¹

Thus, the same perspective and ability to be present to what is within and without became a valuable life skill that carried Dubble far beyond the realm of dance.

It's just a really interesting way to look at your life from that perspective. How do you keep trying to live from your better self, and what *is* that, what is your dharma in the world? And how can you use your yoga practice to explore that deeply, and bring that forth? That is what engages and interests me now.²⁷²

Above all, this added dimension has granted an extraordinary gift that goes beyond accruing perspective and living a meaningful life to our full potential, and extends into a general sense of well being. For Dubble, the practice and living of yoga has given hope in the midst of the outer turbulence of the world we live in as well as with the inner struggles we face with the inevitability of aging and loss of our corporeal being.

That is just a huge benefit. It is changing who I am and how I see myself, how I respond to my students, how I interact with my family, and how I am a living participant within the world. It has given me tremendous hope for living in this world as it exists now, with all of the challenges that we face as a country and as a universe. Yoga provides me with many positive role models for growing older, and gives me a lot of hope in terms of what I can look forward to in my senior years.²⁷³

Dubble recognizes that her yoga practice differs very greatly in this respect from her former career in dance. Growing older in the world of dance encompasses a tremendous struggle to first find, and then maintain your potential for as long as possible. Dubble found that dance, due to its extreme and often imbalanced nature was often a degenerative force on the body, whereas yoga, for Dubble, has remained a positive guide, regenerative force, and a beacon of hope.

²⁷¹ Peentz Dubble

²⁷² Peentz Dubble

²⁷³ Peentz Dubble

I feel that yoga is, on every level, a practice that helps you grow older. Not just physically, although certainly one accrues physical benefits. ...I think that dance, because of the extreme ways in which it needs to be performed, and the kind of imbalanced way it's performed, it often tears down the body, and eventually you have to stop performing, or you have to start choreographing or change careers. But look at the incredible role models we have in yoga. We look at B.K.S. Iyengar and he's 88, and yes, his asana practice has changed, but he is still absolutely a beautifully embodied human being, and he is growing older really gracefully. I look around me and the mentors that I have within the yoga world are extraordinary beings! I just love that.²⁷⁴

It seems that change is the ultimate signpost, the acknowledgement that our yoga practice is serving us. Whether or not there are tiny and continuous shifts of evolution, and whether or not our practice is embodied with body, mind, and spirit, is an indication of a connected practice. Contrarily, a practice that is cut off from the roots of compassion will quickly become a "should", by rote, or static. In this scenario it is likely that instead of being nourished by our practice, our imbalances will flourish. Those of us who recognize the presence and hold of ambition may find comfort in Judith Hanson Lasater's reflection on her own pitfalls, and learn to distinguish between ambition and discipline:

The difficulties have all been created by not listening enough to what was arising in me, and by confusing ambition for discipline. Now I understand that discipline actually means consistency, consistency of practice and intention²⁷⁵

For the dancer who is not only sparked by drive, but also plagued by its presence physically, emotionally, and mentally, this is a profound shift in perspective.

²⁷⁴ Peentz Dubble

²⁷⁵ Judith Hanson Lasater

Change in approach to dance and yoga:

Experiential

One way in which the benefits of yoga on dance can be seen is in the numerous responses to the following question taken directly from my study: *Does your approach to yoga and dance differ, and if so in what way?* A very high percentage of those interviewed reflected that their approach was at least at one time very different, and that the changing of approach reflected both personal and physical evolution that they associated with their yoga practice. In addition, the practitioners noticed an acquired sense of wellbeing, including elements of the following categories: new means of organization of time and effort, greater balance of body, mind, and spirit, and enhanced creativity, perspective, and perception.

In order to have a framework for discussing these benefits I refer to the eight limbs of yoga previously discussed as described by Patanjali. It is not accidental that the very first yama governs the success of the remaining four yamas, as well as the subsequent seven limbs of yoga. These ethical codes reveal how the sadhaka, or yoga aspirant, is to relate to the world around him or her. Ahimsa, or non-violence, reigns over all else, and one cannot bear the fruits of yoga without compassion for self and others at the heart of practice. If my self - practice is progressing, then I will not have to “try” to bear the fruits of the 5 yamas: compassion, truthfulness/knowledge, non-stealing, moderation, and non-grasping, rather they will be a by-product and fulfillment of my intentions. I shall only discuss those that correlate directly to my paper, beginning with that which governs them all: ahimsa, or non-violence.

I can taste the sweet affects of ahimsa in my personal evolution as a dancer, person, and practitioner. For decades I had been caught in a bitter cycle of overdoing that linked from one generation of my family to the next. There have been many days as a young dancer and now as a mother, teacher/dancer/wife...where I am compelled to continue to do, do, do, at the cost of all else. Ironically, the lists are never completely done no matter if I deny myself the small moments of respite from work, and my mood at the end of the day reflects the lack of self nourishment that could easily be altered with simple choices such as to take an extra breath, drink of water, or lie down for a moment. Now as it is my turn to mentor other dancers and hopefully enable them to bypass some of my own mistakes, I see similar patterns reflecting that I am not the only “workaholic” out there.

Patanjali spells out the importance of balancing persistent practice with surrender in yoga sutra 1.12, Abhyasa-vairagyabhyam tan-nirodhah: The quieting of the mind is brought about by a combination and balance of self-discipline, or persistent practice with non-attachment, or surrender.²⁷⁶ My own imbalance, with respect to “doing versus being” goes way back to my childhood. I can now see how when one member of the family over-does the remaining members hear the tell-tale bitterness and resentment that is a by-product of the over-doer (you *never* take out the trash, clean your room, walk the dog...), a message of failure or inadequacy is delivered, and the under-doer realizes on some level that to succeed and be loved in the world they must be the best *doer* in the whole world.

The mixed blessing of this particular cycle of “never enough” thoughts can prove to be very useful in the pursuit of a dance career. It inevitably propelled me into a furious

²⁷⁶ Taimni...20.

pattern of first doing and then seeking approval for the things that I did, versus practicing non-attachment, surrender, to the goal at hand, embracing and feeling compassionate about what was arising in that moment. This gift of softening the edges around my heart and awakening to an outlook of greater compassion towards myself and others provided the possibility for also seeing things as they really were, and inviting the possibility of altering a deeply engrained pattern that for many years had been very useful in the worlds of academia and dance.

I have always been rewarded for my external work – a dangerous characteristic I believe to be embedded in our culture. This overdrive not only leaves negligible time for letting go, but also has encouraged rampant “type A personality” traits to thrive in and out of the work place. I have certainly seen this in the dance world. The outward successes that have continued to bless me with a good standing thus far in my academic as well as artistic endeavors have also been unrelenting, and extremely unbalanced. For years I have struggled with how to let go and enjoy the fruits of my labor. Yoga gave me the tools to heal this imbalance, and thereby claim a far greater power. Just like a moving train cannot stop and pick up its passengers, so I have found that the restless or busy state of my mind reflects its ability to learn, process, and utilize new information.

It is shocking for me to realize how many hours of my life I have dedicated to worry and stress, and how this impeded my own source of creativity! By falling into the lap of yoga this familiar mode of operation was now put into observation, thereby providing perspective and creating the possibility of inviting a compassionate response to myself as well as the world beyond me. As I heal myself, I see the direct results in my ability to teach other dancers both movement and yoga through the enhanced ability to

tap into an endless supply of intelligence and creativity and balance that hitherto I had been unable to claim as my own.

Bernard Bouanchaud asks the following questions in *The Essence of Yoga*: Can I avoid being overcommitted to my endeavor? Can an excess of one weaken the other? How can we balance not doing enough, doing things well, and overdoing things?²⁷⁷ Truly, those inquiries are food for thought.

Respect for all beings and all things provide the basis from which all else follows. It will be difficult to invite the element of surrender, the presence of deep mystery that moves within us, to shine forth answering our cry for that which is beyond words without believing that we are a worthy vessel. Another example of the simplicity of direct gain can be seen in how we relate to the following yama: truthfulness. 11.36 states that clarity will accompany the person who weighs each word before it is spoken, reflecting on the truth. It is also difficult to fill the shoes of teacher, if the students do not trust your word.

Patanjali is very clear about describing how you can become enlightened as well as why it is so beneficial. Firstly, you reap what you sow.

Linda Cline recalls how yoga is far more connected and centering for her than her dance experience, and that the element of breath awareness has become fundamental.

Breathing - yoga - is the only thing that keeps me in the moment. Dancing is not always in the moment. I am concerned with others, competitive, {I have all these other thoughts like} 'I'm so hungry', or I'll have to race out early; I don't experience that in yoga. ...I am more in the moment.²⁷⁸

Cline also realized that in dancing she had less reverence for her body:

²⁷⁷ Bernard Bouanchaud, trans. Rosemary Desneux, *The Essence of Yoga; Reflections on the Yoga Sutras* (Rudra Press, 1997), 17.

²⁷⁸ Linda Cline

...I throw myself around... I remember preparing for an audition. I was going to rehearsal, taking class, and my body was so immobile -there was so much stress. I was overworking and full of tension - I don't know how I got through the audition, don't know if it was an injury...I went to a chiropractor and he didn't have much to say. Life went on with subliminal pain. My body was not a temple at that time, just a workhorse.²⁷⁹

Several dancers, such as Christopher Caines, described that their approach to yoga was based in their approach to dance training. Caines noted both similarities and differences in his aesthetic approach, focus, and competitive nature.

I think I am oriented toward doing everything beautifully: good flow, aesthetic... I am competitive with myself. I watch other people, admire and imitate them. I am striving and aspiring.²⁸⁰

Caines feels he has greater awareness of his role in society within the context of a ballet class, whereas in yoga, the focus is more internal:

In ballet I am conscious that I am doing it not just for me, {but} for the art form, as part of the larger art form that I am a part of. I have a greater responsibility. In yoga it is just for me, no one is judging me; it's not related to my public role.²⁸¹

Caines noted that the class work in dance is a great deal faster; he associates dance with learning a greater scope of material and recognizing that the brain functions for him in a different manner. This contrasts the challenge presented in yoga of calming and quieting the mind.

Being in class, executing in class – I'm a very verbal person, and fast. In yoga, calming the mind is very difficult for me. In dance it is more about learning, the brain is doing different things.²⁸²

I equated this as a practice that encompassed the physical benefits of body awareness and maintenance, and in addition stress reduction. Caines feels very strongly

²⁷⁹ Linda Cline

²⁸⁰ Christopher Caines

²⁸¹ Christopher Caines

²⁸² Christopher Caines

that yoga was not a substitute for dance due to the difference in vocabulary, use of space and relationship to music. Although one of the studios (OM yoga) at which Caines had studied used music, yoga is not a musical discipline for him; there was not the same emphasis on musicality and rhythm, or use of live music, something that strongly shapes the essence of his work and life as a dancer.

The musicality: in dance I only work with live music, it is the essence of my work, my life. At OM Yoga they had the music a lot, but no musicality, no rhythms; it makes the whole experience very different. Yoga is not a very musical discipline.²⁸³

What yoga provided was a wonderfully safe environment and relief from the stresses of his life work.

Because I am a professional dancer, my profession is choreography, when I am in class I am supporting my social role, in yoga I feel cloistered, protected, and I choose to do yoga for me.²⁸⁴

On the other hand, Peentz Dubble found similar elements of focus. For instance, one can focus on such elements as anatomy, alignment, connections, and flow, or even focus itself.

My approach is not that different, in both yoga and dance there are several things that happen – one might focus really strongly on alignment, the anatomical aspect in both dance and yoga, and at other times on the flow that happens... Feeling the connection between the edges of your body in space, how the breath moves, or the movements of your mind and consciousness. The very nature of both dance and yoga techniques take you inside yourself. You begin to observe and explore, you become more sensitive, receptive. You become more skilled in refining your actions. That process is the same, like being an archeologist, asking the question, “What if?” That process was one of the pleasures I had as a dancer, and continues to keep the yoga practice fresh, alive, and constantly interesting...²⁸⁵

²⁸³ Christopher Caines

²⁸⁴ Christopher Caines

²⁸⁵ Peentz Dubble

An interesting finding for me was that it was irrelevant whether the dancer answered “yes” or “no”. Within their answers were embedded unifying trends that made them similar and reflected dance and yoga in similar ways. Quite simply, yoga provides a new perspective and language from which to either reflect back to the dance career or forward into a new expression of another physical medium of expression, and beyond. It is like opening Pandora’s box. Inevitably one receives the inherent gifts of either form such as knowledge, awareness, and growth, but first one must see and accept all facets of one’s self, including the painful and difficult.

When asked if her approach to yoga and dance was different, Ernesta Corvino responded with a definitive “no”:

I recognize in learning that my approach to dance is very yogic, and that my approach to yoga is kind of ‘dancey’. Even in stillness there is movement. Once I choreographed a piece where I combined yoga and dance. I think the two disciplines are very compatible, in fact...I feel like they’re the same thing.²⁸⁶

Dancer and yogini Mia Borgatta says that her dancing and yoga had a very different focus. As a dancer, Borgatta was interested in pushing the limits, expressing abandon that would be inappropriate and dangerous within the context of her yoga practice:

My approach to Yoga is very calculated, and very conscientious. Because with my dancing I went into it with abandon, and I know better than to go into it {yoga} with the abandon {I experienced} in dance.²⁸⁷

Tauna Hunter, head of the dance department at the Mercyhurst College in Erie, PA, felt that the major difference between yoga and dance lay in the aspect of competition and group dynamics, prominent factors in the dance arena:

²⁸⁶ Ernesta Corvino

²⁸⁷ Mia Borgatta

Dance is all about competition, and with yoga it's not. It's about being at one with yourself. You can do it {yoga} with a community of people who are in that same place, but you can also do it for yourself. Dance - I have done it by myself - but I find it less interesting and more difficult without other people. It's a team sport. You need other people to motivate the energy...if you don't have enough people than you don't have motivated energy. Private lessons are a different thing, because you are working one on one.²⁸⁸

Hunter describes what it was like to be a freelance artist. That same determination and drive that were vital to attaining her technique and artistry were also necessary to acquire and maintain jobs once she chose to make her way as an independent artist.

For the last eight years of my career I was an independent artist. I had to speak out, and motivate myself to go to class. There was nobody doing that for me. I had to find a class to go to, and I had to get my butt there. There was no rehearsal to follow, and once I had a gig, I had to seek out choreographers to create for me. I had to find opportunities to perform on my own. ...That was very challenging to do. Thank goodness I was in a big metro-plex, Dallas.²⁸⁹

The challenge was to find teachers who would aid in this motivation, by their feedback and attention. For many dancers, the interaction between student and teacher remains a very important motivator and special relationship.

I had found teachers who were of high standard, who had come from NY... who understood where I was in my process and were willing to work with that and continue to correct and motivate me...that didn't just let me take class. I found a couple of people who were able to give me information...there is nothing worse than being wall paper. Not that I needed a lot, but a couple of corrections every day was nice. I was that kind of dancer. I always wanted more information, I think some dancers...some professionals come to class and they don't want the teacher to give them information. I always had a thirst for knowledge. ...Expanding in that way continued to be important to me, even up until the end of my career.²⁹⁰

There were a number of dancers from my study who felt that they approached yoga, to some degree, like a dancer. Cathy Young's practice often includes a variety of

²⁸⁸ Tauna Hunter

²⁸⁹ Tauna Hunter

²⁹⁰ Tauna Hunter

sun salutations and standing poses, with a one-minute Savasana. She uses her self-practice as an energizer or warm up, often to prepare for teaching:

My yoga practice often happens in the morning before I teach. Then I don't have to do the warm up with students, and can give them more focus and still be able to dance with them.²⁹¹

Her practice has evolved however, and Young now lets her practice take on its own shape, accordingly:

Mentally I look at my practice more fluidly. I'll sit on the kitchen floor with my dog in my lap and focus into stillness: that's my savasana. It {savasana} happens every day, but maybe not lying on my back in savasana.²⁹²

Overall, however, Young feels like her approach to dance and yoga differs completely in terms of external and internal focus.

It's very different. To me yoga is all about what is happening internally, not about looking a certain way, or achieving something, it's about mental stillness... nurturance, meditations. I try to bring some of those qualities to dance. I have a fluid movement back and forth between the two, but I do pay attention to how things look from the outside {in dance}, and as a yogi I try not to do that.²⁹³

When I spoke with Renée Jaworski, she was in the midst of performing with Pilobolus for her last season as a full time member of the company. Jaworski was clear that for her the approach was the same now, but used to be different. When asked if her approach to yoga was different from dance, Jaworski described this evolution:

No. I used to. Then when I studied more yoga I realized that the way to approach dance should be more Zen like, more like yoga. It allows you to be more in the moment, and that is what performing is all about, and dancing is all about, its about letting your body be in the moment, letting your mind be in the moment, really being in that moment and breathing through that moment, and feeling that moment and living that moment. Yoga creates that consciousness.²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ Cathy Young

²⁹² Cathy Young

²⁹³ Christopher Caines

²⁹⁴ Renée Jaworski

Jaworski was able to find numerous benefits that ranged from the physical tone to the emotional realm including a deeper awareness and clarity.

Of course it works on flexibility, and it allows you to keep your muscles toned, and there are all these physical benefits, and all these emotional benefits... In my opinion, it allows you to really know yourself, because you take the time to be quiet enough to know what you're thinking – to know what your personality is, and where you gear toward, - where you get stuck, where you are able to let go and breathe through, where you tend to like grip and hold, and not breathe, and where your mind is at that point that you are doing that forcing and that holding. It allows you to think about, to just process your thoughts...²⁹⁵

Andrea Feier, director of *San Diego Civic Dance*, tries not to take a different approach to dance and yoga:

I try to teach, run the dance program, and pursue dance grounded in the yoga.²⁹⁶ Although coordinating, and running the dance program is still relatively new, she is not new to the organization. She has had the opportunity to work as a teacher and choreographer for a number of years prior to her current job offer, however was at first reluctant to take over despite the many offers. Feier said it took a great deal of courage on her part to take this job despite her multiple qualifications and background, which were excellent. She spent nearly two years moving further away from the perfect opportunity, shutting herself off completely from dance and plunging into a devastating depression. But despite her misgivings and illness, the job was ultimately offered at a time when she was able to realize that this was to be her life work, and to pass it up would be to run away.

One means of many for overcoming this obstacle was Feier's continued work in yoga. In fact her teacher, Rama Birch, explained that this experience was truly a kriya, an

²⁹⁵ Renée Jaworski

²⁹⁶ Andrea Feier

aspect of unresolved destiny that required her to rework the foundation of her existence. As challenging as this experience was, Feier found that it has also offered her the unexpected gift of deep compassion for others who are combating similar roadblocks or illnesses that may be difficult to understand. Once at the helm she found a systematic approach. In the beginning she imitated her predecessor, but over time the organization began to take on more of her flavor. Now she is hitting her stride and can see the difference she is making as director. One way that she has impacted this dance program has been strongly affected by her yoga journey. This is reflected in an altered approach from her previous dance life, where the focus and goal were very different.

I would do things not for the joy, but rather as the taskmaster. I spent many years of my (early) yoga practice ...whipping myself into shape - just like I did with my dancing.²⁹⁷

Many dancers find this a familiar theme. The idea of going into the studio to whip our body into shape is not foreign to any physical discipline. Andrea Feier recalled another yogini who had this similar destructive means to direct her self-practice, and how the memory of her own dance experience was an aspect of her own continued self practice.

Yoga was her self-flagellation, another way of beating herself up. I still have to watch this - that is second nature - that's how I got everything that I got. Ultimately, the stuff (from yoga) that has been the most wonderful has been letting go into the moment, letting go with the flow, having no preconceived notion about...where I should go....²⁹⁸

The softening of Feier's approach to her yoga practice and dance has also shifted and enhanced her leadership as well. She has discovered that some of the hierarchical "old school" dance philosophy has limited returns – the student's experience is not

²⁹⁷ Andrea Feier

²⁹⁸ Andrea Feier

enhanced by a hard line approach, but rather by shifting the intention to one of deep caring for each individual.

I had a talk with my kids and staff: the more you push, the more they turn off. We have to completely clear the slate, go with the intention to help every student become a better dancer. There is a profound shift in energy. This comes from my yoga practice, what I truly think I can do as a director of this program.²⁹⁹

Daryl Fowkes, dancer and former teacher at OM Yoga, crossed paths with me when he enrolled at Mercyhurst College as a returning professional. He also described a similar softening to his approach through yoga, as well as a few of the intrinsic differences such as the language and level of compassion that he has experienced as both yogi and dancer. It is interesting to see how similar “self talk” (beating the self up, whipping oneself into shape...) continues to arise in the early memories of so many dancers, and how profound the relationship of the dancer to his or her own mirror or external image can exist in such internal discord.

Yoga helped my dancing – I don’t beat myself up with ballet technique anymore. If I can’t do things, I accept them. I can approach (dancing) with curiosity, openness, and in an explorative manner. I’m not obsessed with mirrors. I can treat ballet like yoga, bring myself in, and feel the placement in my body... There is very little parallel (in ballet), and pubic bone discussion – such as the pubic to tailbone relationship. And in dance the psychology was there. I love dancing, there’s a joy, but I inherited the “got to get this” idea, of having to get somewhere, get back in shape. I associate ballet with panic. It excites me. I get shaken up; my nervous system is a little jarred when I leave class.³⁰⁰

I believe that the focus on the exterior shape of the body can become distracting from the intention to quiet the mind. Yet it is this same discernment that enables the yogi and dancer to focus on neuromuscular patterns that may be imbalanced and detrimental. A good yoga teacher can perceive where a student is getting off course both physically

²⁹⁹ Andrea Feier

³⁰⁰ Daryl Fowkes

and mentally, and offer an alternative means to *observe without judgment*. This is an invaluable tool for the dancer as well. Linda Gabler, long time Broadway gypsy, speaks of this struggle as it relates to her early dance experiences. She was a late bloomer; fell into the world of dance via musical theatre. She has a remarkable story as to how she has continued to struggle with these early feelings of inadequacy that had marked her personal experience. For instance, despite the fact that for two decades Gabler has been earning her living as a dancer, she is still not comfortable calling herself a dancer:

I have never really considered myself as a dancer. I've been in the business, since 1986, for 20 years, dancing and doing Broadway shows. Who knows why? I feel lucky and grateful, but surprised that I have worked the way I have. I did 10 companies of *A Chorus Line*. You could be so good, but somebody is always raising the bar. It's so subjective; there's always somebody better.³⁰¹

Linda Gabler admits that those limitations that can lead to self-judgment (as opposed to observation/awareness, a more receptive and useful state of mind) can pop up in her yoga practice too. Instead of breathing into the obstacle, it is easy to put the mind to work in a self- chastising manner.

I start to feel inadequate..."Why can't I grab my palm with both hands behind my back?" ...I can feel my limitations as a dancer (tight upper back) and feel inadequate.³⁰²

When she starts to feel these same hesitations she recalls a friend's advice on claiming yoga for her own, regardless of the exterior form:

If you're going through the poses you *are* practicing (somebody told me), that is the practice. I met a guy. He said 'you're amazing, so you don't go to India and sleep with the cows. There are all different levels.' I eat meat, I am the only one, I feel like they can smell it!³⁰³

³⁰¹ Linda Gabler

³⁰² Linda Gabler

³⁰³ Linda Gabler

But the majority of her experience in yoga has been a positive one. Yoga became a safe place to be a beginner, and therefore offered a freedom from expectation and greater capacity for growth. Gabler was taken by the combination of mental and physical well-being.

There was this whole different philosophy, the way you think about the body extending, and strengthening the core. I approached yoga ... as a process - in dance I always felt like I was playing “catch-up”. I understood it {yoga} better, and was able to achieve it more...³⁰⁴

Yoga gave Gabler the tools to work on specifics that she had not had the opportunity to address in her previous dance training due to her late start. Likely it was refreshing to not *have* to turn out, nor be held up to a standard, perceived or not.

It was so different from dancing, that drew me in, different muscles, breathing through things, rolling in, a lot of people that weren't dancers could do it very well.³⁰⁵

Now Gabler enjoys a regular yoga practice – as regular as you can get with her career! The benefits have included reduced stress, feeling at the top of her game, as well as longevity of career and the tools to continue to maintain health in a grueling business.

No matter what I am doing, I go through poses every day to get my body going, and as soon as I do that I don't feel creaky. At 42 I feel 22, ready to go. The way it changed my body - I feel long and lean, and I'm 5'2", so that is saying something! I feel really strong. If I feel tense or out of sorts I go into poses and that puts me in control. I don't suffer from injuries, we have a Physical Therapist at the theatre, and I don't go. I don't have to - I know how to fix it.³⁰⁶

Gabler has found these two disciplines both compatible and the skill of learning non-judgment extremely freeing.

Yoga gives me permission to BE wherever it is - wherever I am. Yoga never makes any apologizes; it is non-judging. I take that to heart ...it is not the gym,

³⁰⁴ Linda Gabler

³⁰⁵ Linda Gabler

³⁰⁶ Linda Gabler

not a competition. It is about working within your self, and because of that everyone gets better - even the hairdresser - and there is something so beautiful and pure about that. I remember thinking 'Oh my god, I found the holy grail!' *This* I will come back and do again. It's safe; it's a philosophy of peace. Because you're not fighting anything, not even yourself... The philosophy is as important as the poses. It is a practice of peace, of breathing through, treating your body the best way you can, it's about celebrating your own body, stretching it, enjoying what that feels like, taking care of it, challenging it gently. I work hard, sweat like a pig, but it's not aerobic, {it's} much more introspective work, self-exploration. Yoga will keep me in this business. A lot of my friends say they can't do this, my hip hurts, my knee can't...But I can do everything I could do when I was 26 and more. Yoga is giving me longevity.³⁰⁷

Leslie Kaminoff is not a dancer; yet he is connected with dance on a deep and soulful level. He realized fairly early on that his body would not respond on a level that would live up to his expectations, and didn't want to be less than that. Instead he feels that he has found his way to dance within the context of his yoga and bodywork:

I dance in my work, in my own way, in my work, with the breath, with my clients, in class. There's all different ways to dance, there's all different ways to engage in a rhythmic exploration of life and breath and movement. And based on what I am capable of doing, I have found my way.³⁰⁸

Kaminoff feels that dance can be seen as a form of yoga, however, in that it involves body, mind and spirit:

Dance, from the perspective of yoga can be seen as a form of yoga, it's a form of integrating in your mind, your body, and your spirit – in a way it all comes together, and everything else just disappears. You're just doing what you're doing.³⁰⁹

According to Kaminoff not everyone can dance, however. Kaminoff felt that if he had pushed himself in this direction he would have wreaked havoc on his body:

³⁰⁷ Linda Gabler

³⁰⁸ Leslie Kaminoff

³⁰⁹ Leslie Kaminoff

I would have made myself suffer an enormous amount if I tried to turn my body into a dancer's body. Look at my hips, my hamstrings, my knees, even given that boys have a better shot at it than girls. ...I was still too old, I was 19.³¹⁰

On the other hand, yoga is an area that is available to anyone willing to try. In fact, yoga is a way of living, of learning to discern between what is possible to change, and what is not, and having the wisdom to know the difference:

But yoga, I think if you have the ability to breathe and to focus your mind, yoga is possible...And with yoga, I think the proof is in how you're living your life, and how you're relating to your own process. And whether you're able to make the effort to change the things you can. And able to recognize those things that you shouldn't try to change. You should leave them alone. It's the serenity prayer: The strength to change the things you can, the serenity to accept the things you can't, and the wisdom to know the difference.³¹¹

And so yoga becomes the conduit, the means to learn the art of surviving and thriving the stresses of everyday life, and knowing when to let go. One needs the tapas, or fire underneath their practice, the wisdom that comes from self-study, and the sweet surrender of isvarapranidhana in order to bring the words of the serenity prayer to life:

That's yoga, that's the conduit, that's tapas - Svadhyaya, and isvarapranidhana; it's the same principle. Tapas - you're taking action outside of the habitual - you're doing things that are unusual; it's the controlled stress experience. Isvarapranidhana, you're {saying}: "oh, I'm not in control of this." There are certain things that I have no choice about, to which I can only surrender. And Svadhyaya, that's literally getting next to yourself: sva = self, adhyaya = next to. That's like the wisdom that comes from introspection, so that you can sort out what you should try to change and what you shouldn't.³¹²

Kaminoff uses his own career choices to illustrate the balance of surrender and effort that occurred in his own unique journey.

To me that's yoga. And me, deciding at that early age to pursue yoga and not dance was sort of an act of Isvarapranidhana: "ok, I will never do that, but I can enjoy it on every level without being on stage" And I even managed to be on

³¹⁰ Leslie Kaminoff

³¹¹ Leslie Kaminoff

³¹² Leslie Kaminoff

stage. I was there to move around the carriage, carry the sword in one of the greatest ballets ever choreographed with one of the greatest dancers that ever walked the planet {Nureyev}, doing the role created by probably the greatest dancer who ever walked the planet{Nijinsky} and that doesn't suck. That was pretty good. For a guy that realized he would never become a dancer, I think I've come as close as I could...³¹³

Effects of yoga on teaching

The interesting thing about teaching yoga for me is that the nature of yoga is increased, becomes alive, in the moment it is shared. This makes teaching of this ancient method deeply informed by what arises in the present moment. Originally, group classes remained an anomaly, and only recommended for children. The guru would take on a sadhaka, or yoga aspirant, of serious intention, and the two would enter into a mentoring relationship whereby the power of yoga would be revealed over years of study.

According to Judith Hanson Lasater, the power of transformation occurs in the act of sharing yoga. Patanjali's yoga sutras uses the power of being in the present moment with his very first verse of the first chapter: *Atha Yoganusasanam*: Now the teaching of yoga begins.³¹⁴ We can look to this yoga sutra to remind us that governing the practice of yoga is the thread of awareness and presence, which, in turn, connects all that is to follow:

Just as a thread binds together a number of beads in a rosary in the same way the underlying continuity of idea binds tighter in outline the essential aspects of a subject.³¹⁵

Each subsequent sutra necessitates this commitment to the present, and is revealed with similar nature, that of utmost clarity and condensation. This density and brevity is due to the history of the yoga sutra (it is an oral tradition), which requires a great deal of

³¹³ Leslie Kaminoff

³¹⁴ I.K. Tamini...

³¹⁵ I.K. Tamini...3

tapas (focus, committed energy) and self study (svadhyaya) in order to follow the thread of meaning from one aphorism to the next to enable the mystery to unveil.

I have noticed that this attentiveness and self-study has fostered my ability to apply focus to all other areas of my life and growth. To be in a state of yoga is to go beyond mere functioning, where the brain can be busy thinking about something completely unrelated to the task at hand. Without presence, the task of writing or cooking or dancing has a greater chance of missteps, mistakes, or misinformation. The tendency for a life without deep attentiveness is to live within the realm of our own previous and limited experience, or habitual patterns.³¹⁶ It is not by accident that the latter limbs of yoga incorporate a practice of stepping back (pratyahara) out of our habitual life patterns in order to gain perspective, gathering the drips of concentration, or dharana, into a steady stream of focus (dhyana) in order to discover freedom, enlightenment, or samadhi. Not only does the steady practice of yoga affect the physical asana, but it also invariably seeps into other areas of our lives and being, including everything from our personal lives, to performing, studying, and teaching.

Although none of my questions were directly focused on the specific benefits of yoga on teaching, many dancers volunteered information as to how their teaching had grown due to their yogic journey. Self – practice, the process of learning to listen to the body, of growing awareness, of unveiling the teacher within was one aspect of growth that enabled transference to teaching. This transfers to learning to be present for and with the student, observing students with awareness and interest, being present for what unfolds in the class, all additional assets and by-products of the yoga commitment. There

³¹⁶ T.K.V. Desikachar, *The Heart of Yoga*...6.

are many reasons for this growth: teacher trainings, participating in the process of continuing education as it is passed on in a similar manner in both dance and yoga from one generation to the next, as well the actual field training - teaching in more than one discipline. All had an impact on many dancer/yogis, including myself.

Modern dancer Peggy Baker found that the use of breath in yoga opened up a whole new world of exploration in her dancing as well as teaching. Although she had been introduced to breathing in her dance training prior to studying yoga, there was now a greater and more focused range to explore, and the deepened personal experience and integration of these concepts enriched her ability to make conscious choices about her use of breath. When asked to elaborate on the benefits of yoga, Peggy Baker found breathing to be one of the most fundamental:

Breathing, I found that I really, really liked the breathing practice. I haven't gone into it in the depth that one could, however for me it's an important part of it (yoga), and it introduced many new ideas about breathing to me, that I've been able to ... integrate...the experience of them has just allowed me to be more conscious of different ways of breathing in relation to doing all kinds of things in my dance work.³¹⁷

Baker noted that once she acquired greater experience with the range of effects of breathing, it was a natural step to integrate the breath work into her teaching and exploring the potential benefits for her students. She finds that beginning her class with conscious breath integration enables the student to then carry this awareness throughout the class despite the shift in focus. Baker describes how her usage of breath work is her own amalgamation; similar and yet different to others, like Christine Wright's approach:

I now use breathing practice when I'm teaching, like at the beginning of class. Usually we start laying on the floor, and just bringing our attention to our breath, and breathing in very particular ways that we start integrating movement elements

³¹⁷ Peggy Baker

with, and then we leave that conscious attachment to the breath. But I think because we start that way it has very particular benefits in my class, and I believe that I first encountered that through yoga class, or through yoga, although I have a ballet teacher in New York, Christine Wright, who uses a breathing practice on the floor at the beginning of her class, too. We came to it in very, very different ways, and we approach it differently.³¹⁸

Baker found that there is a difference between viewing these practices as right and wrong, that more important is the effect that the breathing has on your body and how you connect to it. She can trace the exploration of breath back to her early modern training in Graham and Limon, and appreciate the value of teachers who have paved the way before her.

...There are so many breathing practices in yoga – and you’re not learning the right way to breath, you’re having a particular effect on your body and the way that you’re connected to it...I’ve been exploring it in relation to my own technique and teaching of technique work, and in my own teaching of the technique of various conscious breathing practices. And also the two modern dance forms that I trained in the most, in Graham and Limon, both have a particular connection to breath - not just as an idea {more breath in the movements} - but in the actual use of the breath, and it so happens that my teachers focused a great deal on it.³¹⁹

Alexander, yoga, and salsa teacher Joan Arnold observed a shift in her teaching in accordance with her own growth and evolution. Arnold relays that this was due in part to experience, acceptance, self-confidence, and exploration and development of her own unique product and approach:

I approached everything differently when I was younger. Before I had nothing to hang on to, now I am an established professional, with more confidence, I accept there are things that I don’t do or teach; that what I am offering people is unique.³²⁰

Arnold realized that she was not out to impress anyone with an acrobatic approach, but that what she had to offer served a larger population than the Houdini yogini. She offers

³¹⁸ Peggy Baker

³¹⁹ Peggy Baker

³²⁰ Joan Arnold

a safe harbor for those who are seeking a place to experience transformation, and who are willing and interested in participating in the journey.

My friend {an astanga practitioner} told me when I started teaching – I said: “Who am I {to teach}? – There are all these hot shots out there. I’m middle aged, not thin...” – It was my darkest voice, “I’m not acrobatic.” She said: “That is exactly what makes you the teacher that you are”.³²¹

But Arnold’s greatest feedback has been to observe her student’s progress and enthusiasm:

I am helping so many people become not just ok, but looking fantastic at their own level. And there are more of them {students} out there {than the fit/acrobatic yogis}. I’ve had many people of all different skill levels in yoga say “I never understood that pose before you helped me”³²²

By taking a deep and active interest in her students, Arnold taps into her own resources with spontaneity, warmth, and wisdom; her attention is the wellspring for inspiration as to what to do, and what is needed next. She also remarked that this kind of observation and feedback are too often a rarity. In her experience this kind of exchange, or mentoring, is the exception rather than the rule, noting that although she has taken with fantastic teachers, the common feedback ranges as low as 0-4%. This process of deep awareness, listening, and utilizing her knowledge of somatic disciplines including the Alexander technique has given the tools to respond to what is occurring as the class unfolds.

It is the Alexander techniques, movement insight from watching bodies; I give enormous feedback to individuals... It is the accumulative experience, of drawing on all your expertise all the time. I have subbed for a friend at World Yoga. {There was} one woman – I showed her my interpretation of cobra; it was an absolute revelation.³²³

³²¹ Joan Arnold

³²² Joan Arnold

³²³ Joan Arnold

This kind of knowledge germinates into other areas. Arnold has students who are now able to do things in other disciplines, such as pilates, that prior to yoga were not possible. She realized that it is not a question of how many or what asanas that you do within the class, but rather the explanation and logic behind them. It really doesn't matter if you never accomplish headstand – there are so many other variations of inversions that in many instances are a safer, better choice, depending on the individual. If a practitioner does wish to try a more advanced pose, however, Arnold has found that the desire to try it can make all the difference. This same student later approached Joan Arnold for her advice about trying inversions:

I had the same student who was ready to try inversions once she had progressed. She told me that the headstand was something that she hadn't done since I {she} was a kid. I asked her: "Do you really want to do it?" Desire will make the chance of hurting themselves less. I have this 74 -year old woman on her head. Chances are if they don't want to do it, they're not ready to do it.³²⁴

But the key is not to focus on the results, but to stay in the moment; to reap the benefits of being alive in the unfolding of each moment, each asana:

The process is endless; you might as well hang out where you are. See what comes out. It gives your work a richness.³²⁵

Linda Cline described how the knowledge from yoga classes and teacher trainings has become both embodied in her teaching as well the very source from which the information arises:

I see it more {from} a dance teacher perspective, and how I incorporate it in the classroom. I rely on it heavily, more so than I think I realize. Because it {yoga} is such a part of my body now, the whole way that I approached movement is informed by yoga. Now that could be because I am not taking dance classes. So,

³²⁴ Joan Arnold

³²⁵ Joan Arnold

I might be really leaning on whatever is feeding my movement, which would be yoga right now.³²⁶

Separated from the following statement this could be construed as a limitation for some dancer/choreographer/teachers. The key is in observing how Cline's own work, informed by yoga, has thus transformed her dancers. The influences of yoga become apparent in the following three areas: (1) Cline's movement influence's how and what her students will learn. (2) The process of learning yoga and, more importantly, how to question enhances the student's ability to perceive and understand movement. (3) This type of learning is relative to the environment; yoga provides an opportunity to process information in one's own time and thereby gives the student an ongoing gift of assessment, or discernment, as well as perspective (and the ability to focus on both the finite and the infinite, which can ultimately evolve a young student's own philosophy). Cline describes the difference between her student's level of awareness, and her own at that age:

I see the difference in my dancers. I really see them more interested in what's happening with their bodies. And they're 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 year olds. At that age I knew nothing about my body, nothing. I understood nothing about how my body worked, and I see these kids, I hear them question things, I see them working on things.³²⁷

Cline recognizes that this could reflect both her own evolution as well as that of pedagogy in general:

It could just be that times have changed, I don't know, but I think some of it must be a reflection of the way I'm teaching them. I'm not saying that they'll necessarily get in the company of their choice. I don't beat them over the head with technique, and I don't force them to push, push, push. But I think I am looking at it from a different angle.³²⁸

³²⁶ Linda Cline

³²⁷ Linda Cline

³²⁸ Linda Cline

In order to better understand how this occurred for Cline, it is helpful to examine what she found to be beneficial and transformative in her own yoga studies, primarily the deep understanding and integration of body mechanics:

Mostly, the most important – {aspects that I learned related to} how my body works, and a greater sense of body value and awareness, that translated right into anatomy and technique and all the things important to a dancer. Had I done it sooner, I would have been a different dancer...I had a great experience with yoga just transforming my body.³²⁹

Additional areas of growth for Cline's teaching are perspective and breath. There is a greater sense of spaciousness to her teaching, and overall awareness that enhances her overall experience and enjoyment of teaching.

I have slowed down, I have more patience with what I am doing; I see it more from a breathing perspective. Even if it is just contractions, I try to incorporate breath. ... It is a more anatomy-based approach now, I feel like I am teaching the way I was never taught. Had I not studied yoga I wouldn't even be teaching. I don't think I'd be a dance teacher.³³⁰

Cline is now committed to passing on to her dancers the best of her experiences, the tool of understanding how the body works. If these students continue dancing they will do so with more resources than many of us who began our dancing prior to the surge of interest in somatic experience. It is possible to see in Cline's experience how her intention to pass on what has benefited her most is realized by setting and prioritizing her intentions with clarity, and utilizing them as a new framework for teaching.

Sara Rudner has also evolved a framework for developing a dance department at Sarah Lawrence College. She has designed a program that both challenges and integrates the body, mind, and spirit in an in depth exploratory manner supported by the college's

³²⁹ Linda Cline

³³⁰ Linda Cline

donning system. Here the student has an opportunity to be mentored, is encouraged to study intensely but broadly, and is also helped to question this process in order to deepen his or her aesthetic and physical understanding of their dance experience. Rudner realized that the overall enthusiasm of the dancer could become detrimental, particularly when unsupported by structural understanding and body/mind/spirit integration. As a result, she has chosen to incorporate yoga and Tai Chi in the dance program, two non-performance forms, in order to better equip the student for a holistic dance experience:

Dancers are so eager to be perfect, but what I found is the teachers at Sarah Lawrence approached yoga as a way of understanding, more than just how do you put your leg over your head. It is a function much deeper than that, it is an integration of our minds and bodies and spirits, and that is hopefully what the students are taking away {from their classes} with Patty Bradshaw and Susan Braham.³³¹

Rudner's experience of Hatha Yoga as a support for the integration of the mind, spirit, and body evolved over a number of years, including many conversations with a colleague and yogini, Sheela Raj, who developed a system called Moving Breath. It was here that Rudner explored how Hatha Yoga could enable the body to become in service of mind and spirit. Raj felt that Hatha yoga was designed in order to support spiritual practices such as meditation. You needed a strong body, so that the neurological and musculoskeletal systems could support the mind and spirit. These ideas had an enormous impact on Rudner personally and as a teacher:

{Yoga} took me to a more personal place. I think of dance not only as external experience, but that it is an internal experience of body, mind, and spirit. So those ideas have had a great affect on me personally, on the program I'm directing, and hopefully on the students. That dance is a way of life, as is yoga. Hopefully it goes beyond that, and people start to understand how it is personally enriching,

³³¹ Sara Rudner

and therefore may have some resonance for our communities, our societies, and maybe people around the world...³³²

Rudner's commitment to process was a direct result and evolution from her early dance training, remiss in a deeper neuromuscular understanding until after she had left Twyla Tharp's company due to the onset of osteoarthritis in her right hip at around age forty. Like many dancers, Rudner was able to imitate well, but was given little to no skeletal understanding or somatic guidance. This had an extraordinary impact on her body through extended overuse of joints, along with such factors as a hereditary predisposition for arthritis, great range of motion due to shallow hip sockets, and the athletic, flung nature of her work coupled with her drive for more, more, more.

Despite the lack of somatic tools in her earlier dancing, Sara Rudner had a wonderful instinct to guide her. She was also fortunate to have found a good fit for her body in Tharp's work that enabled her to enjoy a rich career with Twyla Tharp as well as decades of exploratory and highly physical choreographic work of her own. Rudner describes what it was like to operate on intuition, and in a time when somatic work had not taken such a strong hold.

I think a lot of my early training was by imitation. What I could do was – I could achieve certain looks – but {as to} understanding what was really going on, I never really had a teacher - except maybe for Don Farnsworth - who was kind of more into somatic activity, but he never shared the sources of it really, so he could help you do it by touching, but there was never a really deep analytical understanding of what you were trying to do. At that time different studies were not available, they weren't common. Of course, the ideokinetic work was going on, people were interested in all of that. But it had yet to be applied to more traditional work. So I can safely say that I spent my entire dance career going on my intuition.³³³

³³² Sara Rudner

³³³ Sara Rudner

Rudner was fortunate to have had movement developed on her own body however, and in that way her natural abilities were utilized to her fullest potential despite the lack of structural understanding and physical stresses.

Luckily the form I was working in, a lot of it was developed on my body. So it kind of felt natural, and I was strong and flexible enough to deal with many of the stresses and strains that we were under. Unlike a ballet company, when you dance in a small modern company, you dance all the time.³³⁴

Rudner related what it was like to dance intensely in a small modern dance company during her prime. It is a grueling life, deeply committed and exciting, and there was no room for injury. Your body and your love of your work had to be strong enough to meet the needs of your company. Particularly if you were technically immature, as Rudner explains she was, at that time.

It's not like you dance 2-3 x a week. If it's an 8 week season, you dance 2-3 pieces every night, and that along with lack of time to - we never knew when we had vacations, we never knew our schedule the day before, therapy, physical therapy - there was no reason to go to do that because, you know, everything hurt most everybody.... But a lot of it was *my* misunderstanding of what I was seeing, how people were achieving certain things. So technically I was immature, but my body could accomplish a lot. I didn't know what I was really aiming for. And I worked very hard. I *loved* dancing. I *loved* Twyla's work. And then I stopped dancing with her. I worked with her about 9 years, and then I left for about 3 to do my own work, to follow my own interests, because I knew - I loved Twyla's work - but I knew that if I spent all the time with the company, I would never get a chance to do anything else. - It was totally time consuming.³³⁵

Later, with the introduction of ideokinetic work with Nancy Topf and the study of yoga with Mary Dunn and Kevin Gardiner, Rudner began to dynamically understand what was really going on in the spine. Through her study of yoga, commonly used classroom directives took on new meaning, and this rich journey has just continued ever since.

³³⁴ Sara Rudner

³³⁵ Sara Rudner

I too, started joining some of those (yoga) classes, and found that, along with the ideokinetic work, really enlightening about the skeletal relationships, and what we're really talking about in the lumbar spine. No one ever really talked about the lumbar spine to me. Everyone said in class: "pull up", "or get on your leg!" What does that mean? ...So I started to understand all of those directions, the words my teachers had been using. And I could understand them in a more intimate, personal way and analytical way. I can say from that time on that my knowledge has – I mean I just keep on learning things as I continue these studies. And yoga was a beginning.³³⁶

Because dance remained an ever unfolding mystery, Sara Rudner has spent a great deal of her life seeking answers to questions that she now poses and encourages her students to explore: Why am I doing this? What is the purpose of the plié? This strategizing is also reminiscent of her collaboration with Irene Dowd, whom Rudner brought on board to Sarah Lawrence in order to fill in her own gaps of understanding of hardcore movement analysis. It was through this relationship that Rudner was introduced to the idea that there is no wrong movement, just a means to strategize, a philosophy that Rudner says she learned from Irene Dowd and Peggy Gould, and found deeply transformative.

There is no wrong movement; there is a way of looking at it and strategizing how you go about trying to achieve something, and what you're actually doing. And that is what really kind of struck me. There was no "you have to do that this way", but there was a strategizing. What are you doing when you do an arabesque, what is the plié really for, how do you really develop core strength? What do you do with it? What are your options with it? This, as a dancer and choreographer was just mind-expanding.³³⁷

Rudner was appreciative of all the steps along the way. Although her studies of yoga are not avid, and she stayed enough on the fringes of the yoga community to avoid the competitive aspect that can be present in this field, her yoga studies have become both a stepping-stone to deepening her dance experience and a point of reference. Sara

³³⁶ Sara Rudner

³³⁷ Sara Rudner

Rudner stated that her quest is to discover the potential of the body without being locked into any one solution, and that her somatic journey has been deliciously continuous, expansive and freeing. In many ways, yoga was a beginning, a way to enter into a relationship of discover and questioning:

...To imagine the potential of the body: not being locked into other solutions, but then appreciating other solutions more. So I found through all this work, that is still ongoing, just this great expansion and opening up instead of this closing down. And, when I now have an injury of some sort, I don't panic, I don't think "oh well this is the end of...I can't do that anymore". No, we have to find out what it is you are trying to do, what's your idea, how are you operating, how is this happening, and in a way yoga was one of the first steps along the way.³³⁸

Now Rudner's work is an amalgam of her lifetime of dance and movement exploration, performance and studies. She draws from myriad somatic disciplines in her dancing, choreographing, and teaching. Rudner likes to think of every movement as a variation on Tadasana (mountain pose), just fancier depending on the current relationship to gravity:

Everything we do is a variation on relationship to neutral gravity, gravity neutral.³³⁹

Rudner will utilize the vocabulary of yoga with her understanding of body structure to inform her movement and dancers. She explores the yoga asanas spatially, exploring the movement potential behind it in order to inform the body:

Sometimes I say, ok, we're going to do downward facing dog: the arm action into the shoulder girdle, shoulder girdle action into socket, placement of the scapulae on your ribs, working up to it, how you do a downward dog without dislocating your shoulders, and how to prevent yourself from going into spinal extension, all of those things. So I use the forms to illuminate internal awareness of what is happening, and they have indeed become integrated.³⁴⁰

³³⁸ Sara Rudner

³³⁹ Sara Rudner

³⁴⁰ Sara Rudner

Another example of the integration of yoga in Rudner's work is in her approach to inversions, familiarizing the body with new orientations to gravity that feel foreign and disorienting to most dancers, particularly with little to no gymnastic experience. Her secret is in the explorative nature, and the heightened awareness of the internal experience.

And we have done a lot of inversion, like handstand - simple versions. Where are you feeling this? How are you approaching this, how are you coming down, how am I sustaining it? ...The first time you go: where the hell am I? ... {It's} Like lying on your side: it's a great way for people to understand more about their structure if you're put into an unusual situation which definitely an inversion, for most of us, is. Unless you're brought up as a gymnastic baby, or you're born into a family of aerialists or acrobats, these {explorations/questions} are wonderful tools, they put you - it's like going to another culture. All of a sudden you go: "Oh my god people don't eat with knives and forks!" All of a sudden you go: "Oh my god, I'm carrying my weight on my arms!" All of that is fabulous, its just great stuff. So my personal practice and teaching is both fundamental and eclectic.³⁴¹

Aside from the usefulness of body, mind, spirit integration and yogasana in Rudner's work, are the underlying concepts of perception and gravity.

...Dancers are so eager, that it can become achieving without grounding. You must understand gravity to guide you. How do you create the image of lightness? You need the musculature to create those images. Look at his body: the most compact, strong, grounded individual appears to be light. Figure out how to create the illusion, all dealing with the same basic elements. The yoga is a very present, and can be a very grounding study.³⁴²

Rudner cautions that the study of yoga can become focused too greatly on the external achievements, however. She differentiates between this external focus and the performer who is able to be deeply involved in a personal and communicative experience.

Yoga can also lead to desires of achievement that can be counterproductive, and can take you out of your internal experience, and what is happening. I am personally attracted to performers who are having the deepest personal

³⁴¹ Sara Rudner

³⁴² Sara Rudner

experience, with what they are doing, not the more superficial experience. That's what I find interesting. The more you know about yourself, the more involved the practitioner is with what they are doing - deeply - the more communicative it is.³⁴³

Not only is this far more interesting as a performer, but also for practical purposes, for the longevity of the career. Rudner now teaches that pain is not good, that consistent pain should be a vital area of focus in order to gather information, find new physical means to accomplish a goal, and heal.

I'm trying to let my students know that pain is not good. If you are in consistent pain that's bad, you should consider it. You should talk to whatever mentor you have about it – whether it's your anatomy teacher, your kinesiology teacher, your physical therapist, your doctor. You gather as much information as you can about what is going on, and have faith in the healing power of your body.³⁴⁴

This physical information is only a piece of the larger whole, however:

But it can't be physical practice devoid of mindfulness, and for lack of a better word, spirituality – By that I mean ...I guess spirit is what integrates us, integrates our parts, gives us perspectives, it gives us a sense of being, of well being, but we cannot get to that without engaging our present corporeal state. It's all tied up together with our neurological system, our skeletal, our muscular system... you cannot isolate, any practice that isolates, or compartmentalizes is going to be tricky.³⁴⁵

There is so much rich information that is left out of the picture when the focus remains on the physical experience. Physical sensation alone is a risky means of monitoring structural awareness, and the possibility of manifesting imbalance of self and wellbeing skyrockets. As professional movers we “see” our world through our kinesthetic and kinetic experience, but Elizabeth Kadetsky invites us to literally redefine ourselves in relation to our physical experience. In her book entitled *First There is a Mountain*, Kadetsky responds to the probing query: “What is physical?”

³⁴³ Sara Rudner

³⁴⁴ Sara Rudner

³⁴⁵ Sara Rudner

Understanding a new definition of physical suddenly seemed at the very heart of yoga's ability to heal me. Doing so was showing me a large and awesome universe. My capacity to feel was unbounded by the constraints of my physical outline. Kaivalya, or freedom, was sometimes defined as breaking the bonds that tied you to the material realm.³⁴⁶

By becoming attuned to the myriad ways in which our thoughts define and limit our experiences, we become pliable enough to be *present* for what is occurring in our lives in that moment. The powerful act of participating in our lives, with interest versus expectation, leaves us open to infinite possibilities, and therefore free from the constraints of our habitual blend of conventional and cultural memes.

When I watch children respond to life with their bodies, I see them move in accordance with some deep inner expression, a kind of physical knowing of what they are hungry for. Children respond innately to the call to move and run, wiggle and turn upside down. My daughter likes to surprise us with her unexpected movement vocabulary; she will spontaneously dangle backwards over a chair in the middle of dinner, (perhaps the hardest and last place to learn convention). It is not long before that physical connection to self is socialized; one is expected to quell those instincts in order to fit into social circles and redefine self, in relation to the world.

This physical response to life is adapted for dancers as well, adapted to a new conventionality. One goes through a process of trying on the various forms and vocabulary to see how they fit. Many of these forms, like ballet, are estranged from indigenous movement, highly intellectual and structured, and, to varying degrees, uncomfortable and can easily become divorced from sound neuro-musculoskeletal functionality. What the somatic discipline has to offer is the opportunity to process

³⁴⁶ Elizabeth Kadetsky, *First There is a Mountain: A Yoga Romance* (Little, Brown, and Company, 2004), 193.

movement vocabulary in a manner that is conducive to learning the grain of one's own body and chosen discipline. Because yoga offers such a complete system of integration and evolution of the body at the level of mind, body, and spirit, it is my belief that it is the greatest gift and system of support that I have yet discovered. For myself and many others a yoga practice has become a conscious decision to experience consciousness on a cellular level, to deepen bodily understanding and integration by passing more time with the body in a variety of differing postures, and thereby unlocking the secrets of body, mind, and spirit that rest in layers far beneath the superficial. By breathing into the spaces in-between the movement, and even in-between breath, a dancer invites a more intimate understanding. It becomes imbibed, and then it is at our bidding, our calling.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Throughout my research I was able to utilize the majority of the many classes that I have been fortunate to have during my experience at Wesleyan over these past six years. It is no accident that my very first GLSP course was entitled *The Practice and Philosophy of Hatha Yoga*. In many ways, following the path of yoga has become my calling, and I feel extremely honored that my former professor and Iyengar teacher Peentz Dubble was willing to provide me with the more practical and obvious applications concerning this project, as well as provide me with the opportunity to hear part of her story during our interview together.

Kinesiology has also played a crucial role, and I feel both thrilled and fortunate to have had George Russell, D.C. as my advisor. His knowledge and expertise has enabled me to grow as a teacher, performer, and person in numerous ways over these past years, and I feel indebted to his passionate, ethical, creative, dedicated approach to teaching and mentoring that has inspired me to strive for furthering my own knowledge as well as passing it on. The independent study with Dr. Russell was extremely helpful for me in learning to connect my personal experience with the more universal experience, of teaching students and dancers. My awareness of multiple forms of intelligence such as those of leading theoretician Howard Gardner enabled me to perceive, process, and ultimately share my findings with a greater degree of success. Due to my awareness of the variety and unique configuration of an individual's learning methodologies, as based upon their attractions, affinities, and natural abilities, cultural surroundings and hereditary

circumstances, this particular course has remained an invaluable and essential tool of assessment. The knowledge that differing affinities and learning methodologies is not only present, but also a frequently ignored and misunderstood factor in an individual's growth has enabled me to remain cognizant of how this may have impacted the dancer/yogi as I gathered and processed information, as well as continue to bring my findings back into the classroom.

The skills that I learned from Dr. Russell's improvisation course also provided me with essential gifts and guidelines throughout this study as well. Since our entire life is ultimately a seamless and continuous improvisation (not only in every waking moment, but also subconsciously as we roam through our field of dreams), my studies in this area enabled me to stay present to the individual subjects of my study as they shared their information and stories. Since everyday speech is a perfect example of this "great" improvisation, I strove to remain available in order to create something new by merely being present to the interaction of my ideas with those of another. Stephen Nachmanovitch puts this concept so beautifully in his *Free Play, The Power of Improvisation in Life and the Arts*.

Each collaborator brings to the work a different set of strengths and resistances. We provide both irritation and inspiration for each other – the grist for each other's pearl making.³⁴⁷

In short, this final project has enabled me to reflect on these past six years at Wesleyan University, embody and deepen the principles learned, and consequently forge into new territories. I believe that the foundation that I have thus far received has brought into fruition a dream that I have to make a difference in this world by listening to the

³⁴⁷ Stephen Nachmanovitch. *Free Play, The Power of Improvisation in Life and the Arts* (Jeremy P. Tarcher/Perigee Books, 1990), 95.

experiences of others and translating them into a language, from the heart, that can be heard by the next generation. Whereas there have been numerous articles written on the benefits and perils of both yoga and dance, the effects of yoga on contemporary modern dance remains a much needed and fruitful area for further research. I look forward to pursuing this scholarly work in the future to a greater degree, particularly in the area concerning the interface of dance and yoga in correlation with the dancer's tendencies, ambition, and drive, as well as injuries, and evolution. I hope this project will be a beacon to others, and provide a means to repay the generous amount of love and guidance that I have received first as a student and young performer, and then later as a more experienced artist and teacher.

Firstly, I enjoyed the challenge of finding a way to put my research findings into a unified context. The act of finding words for such questions as “what is dance?”, “what is yoga?”, and “what attracts myself and others to dance and yoga?” was both challenging and exciting. This process has given me the unique perspective of looking back on a journey that has been evolving for nearly three decades in dance, and around twelve years in the field of yoga. Equally, if not more significant, was the experience of going out into the field and hearing the stories and journeys of my friends and colleagues. Collectively, the years and range of experiences, the breadth of thoughts and perspectives comprised a thrilling adventure to be both instigator and participant thereof. I will always remember this opportunity to connect, to celebrate, laugh, and share compassion over the memories of successes, injuries, and disappointments. It has been a fruitful year of deep connectivity and personal expansion. The experience of living vicariously through the

stories of others, as well as the revisiting of my roots in South Dakota, Minneapolis, Pennsylvania, and New York was stirring, awakening, confirming, and inspiring.

Each port of call brought a flood of memories and an opportunity to retrace my own path from a new perspective. Arriving in my former hometowns, and in particular New York City, reminded me immediately of the thrill of possibility as well as the tremendous effort it took to cultivate a life in the arts. The places triggered memories of people and experiences that remain etched in my personal dance history. Revisiting Juilliard, the Corvino family, my best friends, and dancers that I knew years ago from classes echo with transformative conversations, dreams, and realizations.

Additionally, connecting with dancers (some whom I knew, some that I didn't) far exceeded my expectations. Although I was excited to share ideas and hear their stories, I had forgotten the interconnectivity of the dance world. For instance, Peggy Gould remembered my name from Christine Wright's ballet class years ago, prior to my job with Momix. I reconnected with Gould at the recommendation of Irene Dowd, whom Gould has assisted for years, and with whom Wright has studied extensively as well. What struck me was both the interconnectivity and closeness within the dance community. Although the years of dancing (as well as living in New York) had been challenging on many levels, the support that I had felt within the classes and companies came rushing back to me. Throughout the warm and generous nature of my conversation with Gould, I remained in awe of the remembrance of this camaraderie, and the gift that our lives had the opportunity to cross once again.

As I reflect on the evolution and realization of this project, I believe that I succeeded in finding many instances where my own suppositions as to the value of yoga

for dancers were right on track with the many dancers with whom I spoke and shared ideas. Using yoga as a means to develop and create balance of body, mind, and spirit was clearly and universally seen as an asset. The need for optimal neuro-musculoskeletal function, the benefits of breath-work and relaxation, the objectivity and sense of well-being that are all by-products of a yoga practice remain attainable and available to the individual who is drawn to this form of connectivity and awakening. The need for temperance and discernment was also confirmed, as was the importance of finding an overall support system for dancers and yogis alike, which included a teacher or variety of teachers to expedite the journey with the wisdom and perspective of those who have gone before us.

Each interview was a journey, an exquisite gift and opportunity to witness the extraordinary and fleeting richness that has permeated the lives of these dancers. In their own unique way they have inspired me with their dedication and love of movement, expressivity, and artistry. All have carried the seeds of dance and yoga and spread them further into our communities through their commitment to teach, perform, and remain present to the world around them. Every inquiry yielded tangible, profound, and myriad responses.

There were points of difference, of course, and surprise. The benefits and successes that I had experienced through my own yoga practice and journey had been so extensive and profound, that I maintained, until recently, a kind of naiveté about yoga. Aspects such as the difference in movement vocabulary and spatial explorations were not necessarily the surprise, so much as a reminder of the complexity of the interface between yoga and dance. Additionally, further examination of the various cautions and

negative criticisms concerning the use of yoga for the dancer, gives the added benefit of greater perspective. For instance, after hearing the comments of Sara Rudner, Peggy Gould, and Christopher Caines concerning the lack of a spatial aesthetic in the yoga system, I was inspired to re-evaluate how I personally incorporate yoga into my dancing and teaching. Prior to this study I think I lacked clarity as to what and how much yoga to incorporate as a dance teacher, as well as how much dance was necessary for my personal movement diet in order to continue with an active performing career.

The most delightful surprise was how profoundly yoga has already shaped many leading individuals in the dance world, and how major dance departments were affected by this phenomenon. I saw a number of characteristic trademarks including an overall environment of reflection and inquiry, which appeared to bring about further observation, investigation and involvement of the students, a commitment to training the whole dancer. It was exciting to see this on an individual basis as well as magnified within a larger context, and how regardless of where the thrust of the individual's life work had carried them, as an outsider I felt a witness to the ripple effect of their own inquiries and study.

Since this study, I have been deeply inspired by the chapter discussing the benefits of yoga for dancers, and specifically the effects of yoga on teaching. As a result, I have actively incorporated a more spatial and exploratory orientation within the context of my dance classes. I loved, for example, learning of the evolution of such artist/teachers as Sara Rudner, whom has inspired me over the years with her dancing, and now with concepts on teaching based on somatic disciplines and yoga, as well as her deep questioning and exploratory nature. Hearing the methodologies and thoughts of

others has enabled me to more readily define what it is that I do on instinct in the classroom that has felt “right”, and further develop my skills in this area. Having others to not only model, but also from which to compare my own methodologies enables me to enhance my attributes and avoid getting off track (which often occurs when deep listening and awareness shut down). Also, I now have greater perspective on how I present and play with movement material as well as listen to my own source of inspiration as it relates to the revealing needs of the student.

On a personal note, I reexamined whether yoga is a sufficient substitute for my own dancing and, after pondering this, as well as returning to a modified class a few times a week in preparation of an upcoming dance concert, I did begin to see a significant change in my dancing in terms of endurance, body availability, and accuracy of performance. Of course this supposition remains highly speculative, because change was in part due to the overall increase of activity level, (throughout I maintained a consistent yoga practice) and also included additional knee pain that reflects the neuromuscular imbalance that surfaces for me when using external rotation extensively, as one does in ballet and modern dance.

I was reminded that both disciplines, dance and yoga, have an enormous amount of substance, benefits, as well as potential trouble spots, and that the key is in learning to listen on a level that acknowledges one’s body logic, while maintaining awareness of patterning and imbalances. The differences within yoga and dance have refreshed my love and enthusiasm for both forms, clarified their unique benefits, and pitfalls, and has reaffirmed what it is that has kept me coming back to yoga, as well as to dance. Bringing these aspects into the forefront of my consciousness has been an important reminder as a

teacher: to bear in mind the individual's unique preference, tendencies, and body type when working together within the context of an asana, class, company material, or in a four-year learning situation, such as the college at which I teach.

I believe that this research has enabled me to further explore, to a greater degree, the contraindications that will inevitably arise depending upon the particular type of dancer or individual. Awareness of this has expanded as I held the stories of each dancer/yogi to heart, paying attention to the tendencies and injuries that surfaced, in order to gain greater objectivity as dancer, teacher, yogini, and scholar. I continue to ponder the relevance of the importance of exploring benefits beyond the physical. Many kinesiologists have undoubtedly puzzled over the value of pretzel-like poses that go way beyond the normal range of a stable joint. Ultimately the success of yoga stems from the understanding of the pitfalls and potentialities of yoga, which then lead to awareness and compassion by both student and teacher. Pursuing the body beautiful has limited and far less interesting returns than the pursuit of grace, balance, and steadiness of all aspects of the person. Remaining mindful of the danger of using the practice of yoga as a purely physical pursuit further reminds me of the importance of emphasizing the many benefits that do go beyond the physical for my students.

Yoga asanas surely carry a shadow side to every benefit. Yet within this several thousand-year-old system there are very specific and detailed guidelines as to how to unlock deep intuitive knowing and enlightenment. One can learn to observe all aspects of the asana (the potential for growth and destruction). Within the context of a class, a single asana, and even a single breath, there is an opportunity to observe the balance of receiving and releasing in every moment, in conjunction with the workings of the mind.

For instance, when I see my body, do I see it as it is? Do I see the essence of the pose? Do I perceive this in the teacher's asana, and when I notice a difference, is my mind in a state of observation or judgment? In other words, are my thoughts bringing about a positive or negative response? If I am in a state of observation, I am better equipped to step out of my habitual patterns and invite radical new states of mind and being, as well as new thought and neuromuscular patterns. Staying present to what is constantly arising while stepping back to observe the self is integral to the yogic journey. Should the practice of yoga include support and understanding of the larger picture through the study of sutras and yoga philosophy – not necessarily as a religious practice – I believe a dancer can work very deeply on areas that will support a dancer's career with clarity, wisdom, and an available facility and avoid the potential reinforcement of old dancer pitfalls such as overuse, injury, mismanagement of stress, and self-abuse.

Throughout this study I have felt the fruits of yoga present in the dance field: in the evolving choreographies, in the classrooms, within the dancer's understanding of movement and self (and resulting perspective), and ultimately in the process of evolution towards peace.

Thus, I return to the very first three yoga sutras for guidance in teaching: *Atha yoganusasanam*, here and now the teaching of yoga begins, *yogah cittavrtti nirodhah*, (with the ability to direct and focus the mind)³⁴⁸, and thirdly, *tada drastuh svarupe avasthanam*, “then the seer abides in its essence”.³⁴⁹ This sequence is such an empowering and remarkable reminder that deep knowing comes from a place where we are not only present and focused, but also available to be a conduit for that special

³⁴⁸ Bernard Bouanchaud, *The Essence of Yoga*...4.

³⁴⁹ Judith Hanson Lasater, PH.D., P.T., *Living Your Yoga*...3.

exchange that occurs within the dance studio. When our busy mind is quiet and we are ripe with awareness, we are available to participate in spontaneity. The art of seeing and responding to the needs of the moment not only taps into our own experiences, but also brings to life the lineage of teachers who we bring with us into the studio.

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LIST OF INTERVIEES

<u>INTERVIEWEE</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>
1. Christina Maria Adelhardt	Union City, PA
2. Joan Arnold	Ancram, NY
3. Peggy Baker	Toronto, Ontario
4. Nancy Bannon	Irvington, NY
5. Wendy Blum	New York, NY
6. Mia Borgatta	Brooklyn, NY
7. Susan Braham	Brooklyn, NY
8. Christopher Caines	Brooklyn, NY
9. Linda Hurtado Cline	North Charleston, SC
10. Andra Corvino	New York, NY
11. Ernesta Corvino	New York, NY
12. Rebecca Anderson Darling	Gaylordsville, CT
13. Michelle Doyle	Minneapolis, MN
14. Peentz Dubble	Newton, MA
15. Andrea Feier	San Diego, CA
16. Ara Fitzgerald	New York, NY
17. Daryl Fowkes	Erie, PA
18. Meg Fry	Jackson Heights, NY
19. Linda Gabler	New York, NY
20. Aviva Geismar	New York, NY
21. Sonya Gotz	New York, NY
22. Peggy Gould	New York, NY
23. Rebecca J. Hansen	Tea, SD
24. Tauna Hunter	Erie, PA
25. Renée Jaworski	Torrington, CT
26. Leslie Kaminoff	New York, NY
27. John M. Kent	Norcross, GA
28. Judith Hanson Lasater	San Francisco, CA
29. Joseph Mills	Chicago, ILL
30. Nadine Mose	New York, NY
31. Weena Pauly	Brooklyn, NY
32. Sarah Plummer	New York, NY
33. Aggie Postman	New York, NY
34. Danielle Robinson Prater	Edina, MN
35. Nina Reis	NY
36. Deborah Rubin	Toronto
37. Sara Rudner	New York, NY
38. Eileen Thomas	Brooklyn, NY
39. Lani Wiessbach	Erie, PA
40. Dariel Woltz	Westfield, NY
41. Cathy Young	Phoenixville, PA