An exploratory study of passion in professional ballet dancers

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Objectives: The objectives of this study were to a) examine professional ballet dancers’ views on their passion and the cognitive and behavioural effects that are associated with harmonious passion (HP) and obsessive passion (OP), b) explore the characteristics of HP and OP, c) gather knowledge of the dancers’ views and experiences of the role of HP and OP, and d) examine The Passion Scale qualitatively to provide better insights within the ballet context and to determine where interventions need to be directed.

Design: A qualitative design was utilised; this design has not previously been employed in this area.

Method: ‘Snowball sampling’ facilitated recruitment of 20 professional dancers who took part in focus groups following the completion of The Passion Scale. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data, using both inductive and deductive approaches.

Findings: Eight main themes emerged under the universal dimensions of ‘antecedents’ (development of passion, ballet is in harmony with the rest of their lives, and juxtaposition of choice) ‘consequences’ (mood and emotional effects, and dancing whilst injured) and ‘synthesis of antecedents and consequences’ (a variety of experiences, the fluctuation between HP and OP, and the need for OP in ballet).

Conclusion: Passion is interpreted differently in a professional context, OP may be more likely to develop in vocational ballet schools, harmonious thoughts may lead to obsessive behaviours, and OP may be needed and beneficial in the ballet context.