



# **Enabling characteristics in the process of aspirational fulfillment amongst academics, dancers, and volunteers**

**Características que favorecen el proceso de cumplimiento aspiracional entre académicos, bailarines y voluntarios**

Author: Josefine Charlott Ferger

Tutor: Simone Belli

Masters thesis

Masters in Social Psychology

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Course 2021-2023



**AUTORIZACIÓN PARA PUBLICACIÓN DE TFM EN LA REVISTA DEL MÁSTER  
UNIVERSITARIO EN PSICOLOGÍA SOCIAL DE LA UCM**

Mediante la presente, el alumno Josefine Charlott Ferger, en carácter de autor, y el profesor Simone Belli, en carácter de tutor, autorizan a la Revista del Máster Universitario en Psicología Social de la UCM (ISSN: 2341-4464) a publicar el trabajo titulado "Características que favorecen el proceso de cumplimiento aspiracional entre académicos, bailarines y voluntarios".

Asimismo, aceptan ceder los derechos de publicación a título gratuito a los Editores responsables de la Revista, sólo a los efectos de publicar dicho trabajo en la mencionada revista.

Para que conste a los efectos oportunos, firman en Madrid a 10 de julio de 2023.

Fdo.: El alumno

Fdo.: El tutor

Firmado por BELLI SIMONE - DNI  
\*\*\*\*5803\* el día 10/07/2023 con un  
certificado emitido por AC Sector  
Público



## DECLARACION DE NO PLAGIO

D./Dña. Josefine Charlott Ferger con NIE: Z0141357G, estudiante de Máster Universitario en Psicología Social de la Facultad de Psicología de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, curso 2021 /2023 como autor/a de este documento académico titulado: `Características que favorecen el proceso de cumplimiento aspiracional entre académicos, bailarines y voluntarios´ y presentado como Trabajo Fin de Máster, para la obtención del título correspondiente, cuyo tutor es Simone Belli.

---

### DECLARO QUE:

El Trabajo de Fin de Máster que presento está elaborado por mí, es original, no copio, ni utilizo ideas, formulaciones, citas integrales e ilustraciones de cualquier obra, artículo, memoria o documento (en versión impresa o electrónica), sin mencionar de forma clara y estricta su origen, tanto en el cuerpo del texto como en la bibliografía. Asimismo, no he hecho uso de información no autorizada de cualquier fuente escrita, de otra persona, de trabajo escrito de otro o cualquier otra fuente.

Soy plenamente consciente de que el hecho de no respetar estos extremos es objeto de sanciones universitarias y/o de otro orden.

En Somosaguas, a 22 de junio de 2023

Fdo.:

## ANEXO II: COMPROMISO DEONTOLÓGICO EN CASO DE TRABAJOS QUE REQUIERAN PARTICIPANTES HUMANOS

D./Dña. Josefine Charlott Ferger con NIE Z0141357G, estudiante del Máster Universitario en Psicología Social en la Facultad de Psicología de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid en el curso 2021-2023, como autor/a del trabajo de fin de máster (TFM) titulado: `Características que favorecen el proceso de cumplimiento aspiracional entre académicos, bailarines y voluntarios´, y presentado para la obtención del título correspondiente, cuyo/s tutor/ es/son: Simone Belli.

ME COMPROMETO A:

1. Asegurar la confidencialidad de la información obtenida, tratándola y custodiándola conforme a la legislación vigente.
2. No utilizar la información obtenida con fines ajenos a este trabajo y no cederlos a terceras partes salvo que el interesado lo haya autorizado expresamente por escrito.
3. Respetar las normas éticas marcadas por el Código Deontológico del Colegio Oficial de Psicólogos y por las Sociedades Científicas de Psicología.

Márquese en caso de que el TFM incluya una investigación en la que el estudiante recoja datos de participantes humanos. ADEMÁS, ME COMPROMETO A:

4. Informar a los participantes de manera clara acerca de los objetivos generales del estudio, de la naturaleza y duración de los procedimientos a los que van a someterse y de los posibles efectos secundarios o complicaciones que pudieran derivarse de su participación.
5. Responder satisfactoriamente a todas las preguntas que los participantes crean conveniente hacer sobre el estudio.
6. Informar a los participantes acerca de su derecho a declinar participar en el estudio y a abandonarlo una vez que éste se haya iniciado sin tener que dar explicaciones y sin que tenga ninguna consecuencia de ningún tipo.
7. Asegurar el carácter voluntario de la participación en el estudio y recabar el consentimiento informado por escrito de cada participante (o su tutor legal). En el caso de estudios de encuesta con muestras completamente anónimas no será imprescindible recoger el consentimiento por escrito.
8. Recabar sólo la información personal estrictamente necesaria para el desarrollo de la investigación y hacerlo manteniendo el anonimato de los participantes siempre que sea posible.

En Madrid, a 22 de junio de 2023

Fdo.:



## Table of contents

1. Introduction .....	8
1.1. Career decision process .....	8
1.2. Barriers to pursuing a career one enjoys and the benefits in doing so.....	9
1.3. Aspiration and career decision influence .....	11
1.4. Self-differentiation .....	12
1.5. Motivation, emotions, and characteristics in each group.....	13
1.5.1. Academics .....	14
1.5.2. Dancers.....	15
1.5.3. Volunteers .....	16
1.6. Important soft skills for success.....	17
2. Objectives for this study .....	18
3. Methods .....	19
3.1. Participants.....	20
3.1.1. Academics .....	20
3.1.2. Dancers.....	20
3.1.3. Volunteers .....	21
3.2. Materials .....	21
3.2.1. Semi-structured interview .....	21
3.3. Procedure .....	22
3.4. Data analysis .....	23
4. Results .....	24
4.1. Motivation.....	24
4.1.1. Loving what you do.....	25
4.1.2. Ability to reach your potential .....	27
4.1.3. Social exchange.....	28
4.2. Mindset .....	31
4.2.1. The four D's.....	31
4.2.2. Resilience .....	36
4.3. Leading factors that aided success.....	38
4.3.1. Social support .....	38
4.3.2. Self-care.....	39
5. Discussion.....	41
5.1. Motivation and emotions .....	41
5.2. Characteristics in the decision process and in enabling success.....	43

5.3.	How barriers and limitations were overcome .....	46
5.4.	Implications and limitations.....	47
5.5.	Conclusion .....	48
6.	References .....	49
7.	Appendix .....	53
7.1.	Appendix A – Semi-structured interview script .....	53
7.2.	Appendix B – Quotes included in the participants Thank-you cards .....	55

## **Abstract**

When it comes to one's career decision, some people are motivated intrinsically to choose a job they love and that makes them feel fulfilled. Others on the other hand, may experience economic barriers and a lack of family support, therefore opting for a career that provides financial security, and leaves them in good standing in their family relationships. The aim of this study was to explore the enabling factors that contributed to people being able to make the decision to fulfill their aspirations, overcome limitations and obstacles along the way, their motivation, and lastly, personal attributes that have contributed to their success. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine participants in three groups: academics; dancers; and volunteers. The content was transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, revealing their motivations to be, loving what they do; being able to self-actualize; and experience social exchange. They also had a strong positive mindset entailing characteristics such as the four D's: desire and drive; determination; dedication; and discipline; a willingness to make sacrifices, and the resilience to overcome oneself and external factors. Other contributing factors were seeking social support and prioritizing self-care. These findings can be used as a blueprint to encourage others to fulfill their aspirations and implement these character traits to gain success, greater happiness, and life satisfaction.

*Keywords:* motivation; aspirational fulfillment; mindset; positive psychology; academics, dancers, and volunteers.

## **Resumen**

A la hora de tomar una decisión profesional, a algunas personas les motiva intrínsecamente elegir un trabajo que les guste y les haga sentirse realizadas. Otras, en cambio, pueden experimentar barreras económicas y falta de apoyo familiar, por lo que optan por una carrera que les proporcione seguridad económica y les deje en buen lugar en sus relaciones familiares. El objetivo de este estudio era explorar los factores facilitadores que contribuyeron a que las personas fueran capaces de tomar la decisión de cumplir sus aspiraciones, superar las limitaciones y los obstáculos en el camino, su motivación y, por último, los atributos personales que han contribuido a su éxito. Se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas a nueve participantes de tres grupos: académicos, bailarines y voluntarios. El contenido se transcribió y analizó mediante análisis temático, revelando que sus motivaciones eran: amar lo que hacen; poder autorrealizarse; y experimentar el intercambio social. También tenían una fuerte actitud positiva que conllevaba características como las cuatro D: deseo y accionamiento; determinación; dedicación y disciplina; voluntad de hacer sacrificios, y resiliencia para superarse a uno mismo y a factores externos. Otros factores que contribuyeron fueron la búsqueda de apoyo social y la priorización del autocuidado. Estos resultados pueden servir de modelo para animar a otros a cumplir sus aspiraciones y poner en práctica estos rasgos de carácter para alcanzar el éxito y una mayor felicidad y satisfacción de la vida.

*Palabras clave:* motivación; realización de aspiraciones; actitud; psicología positiva; académicos, bailarines y voluntarios.

## **1. Introduction**

A common saying that gets said and passed around is to “choose a job you love and you’ll never have to work a day in your life” (Dubreuil & Forest, 2017, p.281). It seems like the best advice out there; if you do something you love then you get to enjoy what you are doing, and it will not feel like you are working at all. At least, that is the simple reasoning behind it. Yet on the other hand, it is also quite common advice, to just get a stable job that offers you financial security and independence, and that allows you to have a good life. We all want to have a good life, and in such an economic world, our career choice plays a major role in our quality of life. Now some people have pursued the former and have the luxury of doing what they love as their career, or at least dedicate much time to doing what they enjoy. While others have chosen the latter and may feel that their career is a mere obligation, and even if they are able to fulfill their needs, maybe they do not get the same sense of fulfillment as those who feel great passion for what they do. As so much of our time during the day is spent at work, that decision we make for our careers should be positive, and at least something that makes us feel fulfilled (Dubreuil & Forest, 2017). Now we all aspire in life and have things that we deeply enjoy doing. So, what really makes people choose a job that they are passionate about over one that they are not?

### **1.1. Career decision process**

A study on this topic found that when it comes to the career decision process, some individuals are influenced more by external factors, others intrinsic factors, and others, interpersonal factors (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). They described external factors as financial remuneration, also known as income, professional prestige such as the status attached to some occupations, job accessibility and job security. Intrinsic factors are things such as personal interests, self-efficacy which is belief in one's capacity, and the opportunity for professional development. Finally, interpersonal factors are the influence of family members such as being in good standing with one's family. They also found that having a higher congruence with one's parents is seen to increase career confidence and self-efficacy. Parental values, pressure, cultural capital and family obligation is also part of this influence. Other groups or influences also could be teachers and educators, peer influence as one strives for social comparisons and acceptance, and finally, social responsibilities (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). These interpersonal factors can also influence how self-differentiated a person is when it comes to making choices, which is being able to separate the influence of thoughts and emotions of others from one's own, especially in making decisions, and is something that will be explained in greater detail further on (Middleton, 2017). Therefore, as the literature shows, some experience external pressure from family, their partner or peers while others choose a different career because of the extrinsic rewards such as benefits of financial security and opportunity are greater than doing something they enjoy. Lastly, others are simply motivated to go for what they aspire and enjoy because of how intrinsic it is to them.

## 1.2. Barriers to pursuing a career one enjoys and the benefits in doing so

Another important aspect to consider that influences one's career decision and in choosing to fulfill their aspirations comes down to the limitations, obstacles, and barriers that are faced, such as economic barriers or lack of opportunities. For example, some people may feel they could not do what they aspired to do because the costs to pursue it were too high and they were not given the opportunity in life (Ambrose, 2003). In this case, it can seem as though some people in life just get lucky and for others with such circumstances, unfortunately, not so much. Challenges, barriers, and limitations of any sorts are universal human experiences. Thus, one thing that cannot be assumed is that those who are fulfilling their aspirations have not faced these same challenges or others, nor that they have had it easy. Certainly, it may play a role, however, while existing socioeconomic barriers can get in the way, they do not fully block the pursuit of such aspirations (Gewirth, 1998). As Randy Pausch said, "we cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand" (2008, p. 24). Therefore, what really enables people to overcome challenges and pursue their aspirations and why is it so important?

To answer the former, Gewirth (1998) found that there is suppression that takes place when certain barriers exist but do not completely impede one's pursuit. What usually happens is self-sacrificing one's aspirations and their ability to self-fulfill, settling for a low-rewarded kind of job that provides security, and hoping that one's children will be given the opportunity instead (Ambrose, 2003). They attribute their causes to external circumstances which decreases motivation, yet if it was an internal cause their motivation would be much stronger to overcome (Ambrose, 2003). On the other hand, there is an incredible experience that takes place when one chooses to pursue their aspirations, which is gaining self-fulfillment. Cooper (2001) defines it as "the desire for attaining satisfaction motivated by purely innate purposes" (p. 14). The process of self-fulfillment is first awakening of the desire, arriving at a choice-point, taking action, and lastly emerging from the experience with a sense of fulfillment (Cooper, 2001). So, when people awaken to the desire to fulfill their aspirations and act on their decision, they experience that sensation which in turn is incredibly positive to the well-being of the individual. Likewise, those who can fulfill their aspirations and do what they love are also seen to have greater career satisfaction, which is connected to one's level of happiness and fulfillment in life (Ballout, 2017, as cited in Aytekin, 2016). Furthermore, Ambrose (2003) says "it is the passionate, purposeful pursuit of aspirations that spurs a person to develop his or her best capacities" (p. 283). So as one pursues their aspirations, they not only experience growth and development in their abilities, but they also feel that in doing so, they are fulfilling their potential and living their purpose (Ambrose, 2003). To feel like one is living their purpose or fulfilling their potential in doing something meaningful is what is known as *self-actualization*, a concept that Carl Rogers (1951, as cited in Reeve, 2018) discovered, and is something that we as humans are driven to experience and do (Aujla & Farrer, 2015). It has to do with the ability to courageously move forward as one strives to continue, realistically, developing their capabilities, talents, and potentiality (Reeve, 2018). As it can be seen,

the benefits to pursuing one's aspirations, highly impact our life satisfaction and progression. It would be life-changing if more people could experience these things too, not only for the benefits and the increased level of happiness they could acquire, but also their feeling of fulfillment, that they are reaching their potential, and not suppressing their deepest desires of what they really want to be doing in life.

There is a lot of literature that explores the barriers and limitations keeping people from fulfilling and pursuing their aspirations as a career, like some of the reasons mentioned above (Ambrose, 2003; Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Gewirth, 1998), as well as literature that explores a lot of the benefits that those individuals can experience as they pursue what they enjoy in life (Aytekin, 2016). Just as it was mentioned previously, even the people who are doing what they enjoy have also experienced their own obstacles, yet they have still made the decision to go for it and pursue their aspirations. So, again, what is it about these people that makes them stand out from the rest? What enables them to make the decision and be successful, while others opt otherwise? These are some of the questions that interested the researcher in wanting to discover, understand, and explore the full process. This study is therefore based on answering this main question: what is the all-encompassing process that enables people to fulfill their aspirations? In order to answer this question, it is important to examine one's decision influence, level of self-differentiation, characteristics that contribute to their ability to achieve and overcome obstacles or limitations encountered along the way, their motivation to do what they enjoy and some of the emotions experienced as a result.

Now, it is important to note that what may be someone's aspiration, dream job, or way in which they enjoy spending their time is not someone else's. Simply researching people who are doing what they love as their career would be too broad for this study, due to limited time and other variables. Therefore, to narrow it down, this study sought to examine a few groups that were accessible to the researcher: people in academia, professional dancers, and volunteers. What makes exploring and focusing on these three profiles interesting are how it can enrich the findings and be generalized to the population. For example, those that choose a career in academia are truly passionate about what they do and find meaning in contributing to the knowledge that we know of today (Aytekin, 2016; Cannizzo, 2017). Their career is based on a highly demanding intellectual level, they also spend much more of their time in front of the computer, like other careers in economics, office jobs, working from home, writers, and administration to name a few. By contrast, someone who chooses to pursue a career in dance, also feels that their ability to be creative, to self-express, to gain task mastery, and to make their participants and audiences happy, brings them great joy (Aujla & Farrer, 2015). This performing career is a lot more creative and physically demanding such as actors, singers, and entertainers. On the other hand, those who put great time and effort into an activity such as volunteering, which does not give them monetary rewards such as the careers mentioned above, simply enjoy helping and caring for others and contributing to their communities to make them better (Janus & Misiorek, 2019). Together these three groups create an interesting triangle of perspectives that can better be applied to

individuals and society. This study aims to explore and dig deeper into the process that enables academia, dancers, and volunteers to do what they enjoy.

Some studies have been done that have focused individually on the motives either behind those in academia, dancers, or volunteers, while other studies have also looked at the career decision process and existing barriers (Ambrose, 2003; Aujla & Farrer, 2015; Cannizzo, 2017; Janus & Misiorek, 2019; Middleton, 2017). This study will add to the existing literature in a unique way by combining these three groups in one study and analyzing more profoundly the processes, whether social or personal, and characteristics that enable them to fulfill their aspirations, providing an enriched perspective. Understanding better these processes and characteristics can be life changing to others who are struggling to fulfill their aspirations by providing more of a blueprint of what they could implement in their personal lives, and as a form of inspiration and motivation to have the courage to choose aspirational fulfillment.

### **1.3. Aspiration and career decision influence**

Firstly, it is important to clarify what is meant by the term *aspiration*. An aspiration is an “abstract, [of] hopeful ideals created to reflect what an individual desires to do without hindrance or barriers” (Bohon et. al, 2006). Similarly, Ambrose (2014) defines it as “strong desires for achievement of ideals that hold great value for the individual” (p.283). Therefore, one’s aspiration is their deepest desire, it is what they want to do, if they had the opportunity and ability to do it and is highly important to them. Another term that is often used to reference one’s aspiration in life is as their *calling* (Duffy et al., 2013a). Dike and Duffy (2009, as cited in Duffy et al., 2013a) define a calling as “a job that provides personal meaning/purpose and that is used to serve others” (42). Thus, this study, when referring to one's aspiration, implies one’s career, their job (whether they are paid or not, as is the case of volunteers) that they truly enjoy and feel fulfilled pursuing.

There is a distinction between having a calling and being able to actualize and live one's calling, as oftentimes various barriers such as poverty, workplace, and individual constraints can keep people from fulfilling their aspirations as it was briefly mentioned (Ambrose, 2003; Duffy et al., 2013a). In another similar study on perceiving, one's calling and living ones calling, they found that any socioeconomic status and social class can perceive a calling, however those who have access to education and economic advancements are seen to feel like they are living more out of their calling (Duffy & Autin, 2013b). This is congruent in the literature that socioeconomic barriers are what plays a role in hindering aspiration development, capacity development, and self-fulfillment (Ambrose, 2003). Furthermore, those barriers and a lack of family support, can cause an individual to doubt their self and ability to achieve such aspirations and goals leading them to give up easily and suppress them as was mentioned previously (Bandura, 1982, 1994, as cited in Ambrose, 2003). On the other hand, those who have greater access to economic and educational opportunities and resources and who have strong family and social support can have higher aspirations

that they perceive as being attainable (Ambrose, 2003). This literature explains why these supports or lack thereof are important factors to include in this study to be able to understand the role that it plays in the lives of the individuals.

#### **1.4. Self-differentiation**

To be able to understand what contributes to people being able to fulfill their aspirations, it is important to know where they come from and what influences them. Middleton (2017) found that family variables have an important influence when it comes to the career development process. When we come into this world, we start out very dependent on our families for support, as our physical and cognitive abilities grow so does our independence or also what is known as *self-differentiation* (Middleton, 2017:31). Self-differentiation is a concept that was founded by Bowen when he published his book in 1978 on family therapy (Calatrava et al., 2022). Bowen defines a person with a high level of self-differentiation as “one who can be emotionally close to others without emotional fusions or loss of self, or loss of identity, because he has attained a higher level of differentiation of self” (1978, p. 109). Self-differentiation is the process of being able to identify your own thoughts and feelings, to distinguish them from others, and to be able to make decisions without being overly influenced by others. As individuals, we are highly influenced by our environment which contributes to who we are or become. We learn to make decisions for ourselves and become less dependent on our families while maintaining a healthy emotional connection with them. That healthy emotional connection is seen through the ability to value the influence of family, without being completely dependent on them, being able to separate or differentiate their opinions, and make the choice that feels most right, fostering autonomy (Middleton, 2017). Having autonomy allows the sense of ownership for one's actions and choices that align with one's inner goals, interests, and self (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Studies show that when career choices come from themselves, that sense of autonomy also increases their motivation (Middleton, 2017). Furthermore, as they pursue their aspirations and gain that autonomy, they are also able to “prioritize their desires instead of falling prey to manipulation by outside forces” (Ambrose, 2003, p. 283). People with a high sense of differentiation of self-have greater emotional support and interpersonal stability (Middleton, 2017). They can make their own decisions, cope better with stress, and operate on a more emotional and rational level while maintaining autonomy in their relationships (Skowron & Friendlander, 1998).

However, people with low self-differentiation have more difficulty making decisions for themselves. If someone's self-differentiation is low, then the decisions made may be more to appease others, especially family. They have a greater dependence on their families or other social groups when making decisions and do not have a healthy sense of individuality (Middleton, 2017). Bowens' self-differentiation theory also describes this as being fused with one's family (Middleton, 2017). Their greater dependence on their families makes them so connected to and influenced by them that they are not able to make the same separations as those who are self-differentiated. They are also more likely to sacrifice their own needs, as well as their

desire to appease could also be a way to reduce any anxiety that may arise from questioning whether they will be supported in their decisions and therefore may experience more internal conflict (Middleton, 2017). On the other hand, it is possible that people with a higher self-differentiation can make their own choices in what they truly aspire to do and therefore are more intrinsic to them. Whether it is the arts of dancing, academia, or volunteering, family background and upbringing may influence these processes and lead to supporting or deterring one from fulfilling their aspirations and may be a barrier that they must overcome.

Others have found that with the influence of their families, those career choices and identity begin to develop during one's childhood and upbringing (Gottfredson, 1981; Holland, 1997; Roe, 1957; Super, 1957). Super (1957) mentioned that this also comes from a child's curiosity, the modeling of behavior, and desire for exploration. This makes sense especially for those artistic careers such as dancing. More common than not, a child follows a conventional route of taking dance classes and could decide later to pursue it as a career rather than just a hobby (Aujla & Farrer, 2015). That decision comes from the realization that they have loved it since their childhood and has found it to be a factor that plays a strong role in the career decision process (Kostere et al., 2016). A child at a young age could decide to be a scientist or a teacher, especially if it is something that is influenced to them through their families, however it is less than likely. What could be more common is that the decision process develops throughout time as one gets older and goes through university, gaining those experiences firsthand, which spark the interest to pursue a career in the area of academia. This idea is supported by Hansen (1976) who found that the development of one's career is a lifelong process which comes from the experiences of seeking, processing ideas about oneself, about different occupations, lifestyles, and social influence. It comes from the alignment of one's personality to their self-concept which is built by their personal values, beliefs, skills, and ideas behind social roles (Middleton, 2017). These processes can also be what influence someone to further pursue volunteering, while the monetary rewards are not the same as with a career, the motivations and emotions behind them could be very similar to those found in the careers of dancing and academia, which will be discussed further on.

### **1.5. Motivation, emotions, and characteristics in each group**

Motivation is essentially the “why” behind people's actions and is a topic that has been historically greatly studied. Reeve (2018) defines motivation as “those internal processes that give behavior its energy, direction, and persistence” (p. 8). Similarly, as Baumeister (2016, as cited in Reeve, 2018) describes it, motivation is wanting; it is the desire for change, maybe for oneself or for one's environment. That motivation for anything, can come from two different concepts, one being extrinsic, external factors, and the other intrinsic, internal factors. According to Reeve (2018) intrinsic motivation is something that comes from within, it is the motivation to do an activity just for the mere enjoyment of the activity, which is itself rewarding. When we are intrinsically motivated, we do not need external rewards, although those can be influential and a

motivational factor as well (Gagné & Deci, 2005). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation, rather than coming from within, comes from the environmental incentives; in doing something, we get something in return such as praise, attention, food, money, recognition, privileges, and so on (Reeves, 2018). Therefore, bringing it back to those who choose to do what they enjoy, and feel is their aspiration as their career may very well come from both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Cannizzo, 2017).

Another important aspect to motivation, and that is worth considering are emotions. Reeve (2018) describes emotions as being “short-lived, feeling-purposive-expressive-bodily responses that help us adapt to the opportunities and challenges we face during important life events” (p. 287). Emotions are connected to motivation in the sense that they can act as a motive, and secondly, for how they energize, direct, and sustain behavior. They also work as a “readout” system that further indicates how well or poorly an individual is adapting and how things are going (Reeve, 2018). For example, positive emotions such as, “happiness”, “pride”, “gratitude”, and “excitement”, signal that all is well and that there is satisfaction in one's needs and goals, while on the other hand, negative emotions such as, “anger”, “sadness”, “anxiety” or “loneliness”, can act as a warning signal that all is not well and that there is neglect towards one's needs and goals (Froman, 2010; Reeve, 2018; Shamim & Muazzam, 2020). Individuals are also seen to thrive more when experiencing positive emotions and relationships, feeling engaged and accomplished (Seligman, 2011, as cited in Aujla & Farrer, 2015). These things are what are seen to be experienced when pursuing one's aspiration. Therefore, it is most likely that positive emotions will be highlighted more by the individuals in this study.

Previous literature has investigated the motivations behind either academics, dancers, or volunteers. In exploring these groups, many of their personal qualities or characteristics that each group have seen to exhibit, as well as some of the challenges and difficulties they have faced also have surfaced in the literature. These characteristics are important to take into consideration as they help conceptualize what it is about these individuals that are enabling them to fulfill their aspirations. As these are also variables that this study will be examining, they will also be further described for each of the studied groups below:

### ***1.5.1. Academics***

Studies have found how much intrinsic motivation plays a role in one's decision to pursue a career in academia, stating that they find it most rewarding and exciting to be able to make discoveries and explore in depth their inner interests that are both meaningful and personal to them (Ranieri et al., 2016; Edwards & Ashkanasy, 2018). Knowledge has value and Etzkowitz (2003, cited in Aytakin, 2016) mentioned how much of a key role research institutions like universities play in producing and transforming the knowledge we have and know of today. The knowledge gained through research not only impacts the individual but also the country, region, and entire world (Aytakin, 2016). Therefore, the idea of contributing to a body of knowledge with like-minded people brings on a sense of fulfillment; they really want to make a

difference (Edwards & Ashkanasy, 2018). Add those contributions to the authenticity of studying a topic that they genuinely care about and there is a sense of freedom that is felt through their academic labors (Cannizzo, 2017). Having a sense of authenticity is crucial to also feeling true to oneself and is an emotional experience that is found to be a motivating factor for those in academia and most likely in other careers and activities too (Cannizzo, 2017). Previous interviews also found academic work to be empowering, a lifestyle, and a passionate activity (Cannizzo, 2017). Passion is an important aspect when pursuing an activity or career that one truly cares about and aspires to do because it helps them endure through the hard times and less exciting tasks (Cannizzo, 2017). Those who pursue academia have also mentioned it to be a career that is quite flexible and allows them to have a sense of independence which may not be found in other ordinary careers (Cannizzo, 2017).

Likewise, pursuing a career in academia is not an easy one, which is partially why intrinsic motivation is so important. In a study Ranieri (2016) found how only a third of those who completed a PhD continued in the field, due to the others experiencing a change in their career preference or difficulty in their career progression. There is a commonly known pressure in academia known as ‘publish or perish’, this stress can lead to be too much for some, however those with higher levels of self-efficacy, hope, gratitude, and optimism are known to experience less stress (Edwards & Ashkanasy, 2018). Also, the ability to focus all one’s energy, efforts, and commitment in their career leads to greater success (Aytekin, 2016). The motivating factor to be successful also brings a high amount of career satisfaction. While some barriers may be failure to get an article published, or a proposal accepted, any obstacles have seen to be overcome through determination (Aytekin, 2016). Apart from research they are also able to dedicate time to teaching, mentoring, and supporting students (Ranieri et al., 2016). An academic must be able to do surface acting, which is a way they can cope and hide their emotions from any distressing experiences to their students or others they work with when needing to fulfill other commitments (Edwards & Ashkanasy, 2018). A career in academia also requires constant awareness of current research, theories, and developments to succeed in their field and brings on greater competence, self-reliance, courage, and professional identity (Aytekin, 2016). The way they identify and describe themselves whether as a researcher or in any goals that they may hope to accomplish in their career also increases their productivity, motivational energy, and ability to fulfill their career goals (Aytekin, 2016). As it can be seen, it takes a very dedicated and passionate person to pursue a career in academia and an interviewee described it best in saying “You’ve got to love what you do. You’ve got to have passion for it” (Cannizzo, 2017, p. 104).

### ***1.5.2. Dancers***

Similarly, dance is found to be an intrinsically motivating activity, allowing the dancers to be creative, to self-express, to gain task mastery, and to have a way for emotional release (Aujla & Farrer, 2015). The emotional release and creativity comes greatly through the music, as Muntanyola-Saura y Belli (2014) put it, music and

emotions work hand in hand, while music provokes the emotions, the body is able to move in a creative way to interpret and express them. There is something incredibly powerful that takes place in the arts of creative careers and it is what many have expressed as “feeling euphorically intoxicated, loving what you do” (Kostere et al., 2016, p. 146) and feeling that nothing else would bring them the feelings of happiness and fulfillment. The joy that they feel from dance is also what empowers them through any of the challenges that they may face such as periods of instability, uncertainty or unemployment (Aujla & Farrer, 2015). Another reason why a career in dance is so motivating is because of how it fulfills the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness; in regards to autonomy they are able to progress as they pursue their passion with much effort and also have the possibilities to enjoy traveling when touring with their work, with competence they can feel successful as they perform and their hard work pays off, and with relatedness they are able to work alongside other like-minded peers, inspiring each other and co-creating together (Aujla & Farrer, 2015). While some dancers choose to work for a company, others decide to work independently stating that they felt freer to make their own choices, whether artistically or for their careers (Aujla & Farrer, 2015). An independent dancer is also able to fulfill many roles such as a performer, teacher, or choreographer which gives many opportunities for contributions towards choreographic innovation and making the audience or participants happy (Aujla & Farrer, 2015).

Just like those in academia, dancers also describe their work as their greatest passion and as some inner force that drove them to dance (Aujla & Farrer, 2015). The pursuit of their passion is seen to be the motive that came first, before money or fame (Kostere et al., 2016). However, during their pursuit, they also experience periods of uncertainty with their work, have difficulties in planning their careers, as well as experience some guilt when their careers cause them to miss out on important events or being away from family and friends (Aujla & Farrer, 2015). Likewise, in the beginning many dancers must volunteer or do unpaid jobs to give them experience that helps them later. The literature has shown how dancers and those in the entertainment business are strongly committed, determined, disciplined, and dedicated to their work, while not only making the most of the opportunities available to them, they refuse not to quit (Aujla & Farrer, 2015; Kostere et al., 2016). Along with their tendency to work hard, they also exude confidence, optimism, openness and willingness to take risks and strive for continual improvement (Kostere et al., 2016).

### ***1.5.3. Volunteers***

On the other hand, volunteering, an activity that provides services willingly and free of charge and does not offer financial rewards like the careers mentioned above, also exudes similar motives such as improving the well-being of other people (Janus & Misiorek, 2019; Shye, 2010). Janus and Misiorek (2019) found how when it comes to volunteering, the most common motives for why a person chooses to volunteer are usually either altruistic, such as caring for others, or social motives, such as interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, the study also found how altruistic motives

may come from the internal reward of improving one's own self-esteem or maintaining one's self-image, or also from a more outward desire to improve one's situation or prevent it from getting worse, such as one's cultural, social, physical, or mental wellbeing (Shye, 2010). Others have felt motivated to volunteer due to religious reasons or beliefs. Furthermore, some have been found to volunteer at specific events, such as sporting events, due to a deeper passion for the event, rather than the activity of volunteering (Bang & Ross, 2009). Volunteers feel great satisfaction in helping others and doing good, and from feeling that they are needed (Janus & Misiorek, 2019). However, sometimes motives to volunteer can be more egotistical too, such that it can help one promote their career and be in better standing with others (Shye, 2010). Most people who decide to volunteer, have done so for a while, around ten years, and feel that it is part of their daily lives and that it gives their lives meaning and makes them and others truly happy (Janus & Misiorek, 2019). While some difficulties that volunteers may encounter, the most common have been found to be managing the time to volunteer due to other professional responsibilities, and secondly, not being fully supported or understood by one's family (Janus & Misiorek, 2019). The literature has also shown how volunteers display a lot of empathy and patience, as well as are able to effectively organize their time, are open, communicative, and have the social ability to make friends.

In essence, all three groups pursue what they enjoy because of the satisfaction, sense of fulfillment, and happiness that they obtain and feel from doing so (Edwards & Ashkanasy, 2018; Janus & Misiorek, 2019; Kostere et al., 2016). They commonly share the motive of making some kind of difference, whether that be through the contributions they make to society in the form of knowledge, creating innovations and performances that inspire and make others happy, or through improving someone's life or community (Aujla & Farrer, 2015; Aytakin, 2016; Janus & Misiorek, 2019). While each group may encounter different difficulties, their love for what they do and dedication keeps them moving forward (Aujla & Farrer, 2015; Cannizzo, 2017; Janus & Misiorek, 2019).

## **1.6. Important soft skills for success**

Apart from some of the qualities and character traits that have been mentioned from each group, studies have also investigated sought character traits in the workplace, also known as *soft skills*, that help individuals be successful (Robles, 2012). Robles (2012) defines soft skills as “interpersonal qualities, also known as people skills, and personal attributes that one possesses” (p. 453). A reason why soft skills are so important is because of how they are seen to enhance not only a person's career prospects, but also their job performance and interactions (Parsons, 2008, as cited in Robles, 2012). Robles (2012) found in their study that the top 10 most important soft skills for success in the workplace that business executives looked for were: integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, interpersonal skills, positive attitude, teamwork, professionalism, flexibility, and work ethic. *Integrity* refers to being honest, ethical, having high morals, personal values, and doing what is right. *Communication*

has to do with not only one's speaking capability orally and written, but also the way they present and listen. *Courtesy* involves one's manners, etiquette, and being respectful. *Responsibility* is being accountable, reliable, self-disciplined, conscientious, using common sense, being resourceful, and having the desire to do well. *Interpersonal skills* are being nice, personable, friendly, sociable, nurturing, empathetic, patient, has a sense of humor, and has self-control. *Professionalism* involves being businesslike, poised, being well-dressed, and having a good appearance. *Positive attitude* involves being optimistic, enthusiastic, encouraging, happy, and confident. *Teamwork* has to do with being cooperative, gets along with others, agreeable, supportive, helpful, and collaborative. *Flexibility* refers to one's adaptability, willingness to change, being lifelong learners, and easily teachable. Lastly, *work ethic* involves, being hard working, willing to work, loyal, taking initiative, being self-motivated, on time, and good attendance. These soft skills are transferable to any job and besides to one's profession, can be applicable to other areas of their lives (Robles, 2012).

Many of the soft skills just mentioned are character traits and skills that those in academia, dancers, and volunteers have been seen from the literature to possess (Aujla & Farrer, 2015; Aytakin, 2016; Janus & Misiorek, 2019; Kostere et al., 2016). While Robles (2012) investigated the top skills that business executives feel are most important to success, it would be interesting to find out which are the ones that those in each group attribute to being most important to them and have contributed to their success in their field as well.

## **2. Objectives for this study**

This study's main research question is: what is the all-encompassing process that enables academics, dancers, and volunteers, to fulfill their aspirations?

To answer this question, the general objective of this study is to examine one's decision influence, level of self-differentiation, characteristics that contribute to their ability to achieve and overcome obstacles or limitations encountered along the way, their motivation to do what they enjoy and some of the emotions experienced as a result. This allows for the whole process that enables these individuals to do what they enjoy as their careers or volunteer work to be examined and understood and creates a future blueprint that others in their aspirational journey may consider. In order to answer this research question and general objective, the specific objectives are detailed below:

- 1 To understand and analyze the decision process that everyone went through in choosing to fulfill their aspirations, including when and how it started, and what contributed and influenced them in their desires to pursue what they enjoy.
  - 1.1 To identify when exactly these aspirations began, whether in childhood, adolescence, or adulthood, in each individual and between the different groups as a whole: academia, dancers, and volunteers.

- 1.2 To assess the self-differentiation process in everyone to be able to determine if their aspirations, ideas, emotions, and goals came from themselves and were their decisions to pursue or if they were more influenced by the core people around them, such as family, friends, or others.
- 2 To identify the barriers, obstacles, limitations, conflicts, and difficult moments that each individual and group experienced and overcame during the process of fulfilling their aspirations.
  - 2.1 To assess the social support of their family, friends, and other intermediate supports to determine if they were well supported by others around them or if they felt more on their own as they moved forward in pursuing what they enjoy, as well as assess their economic status growing up to see if it was a barrier they had to overcome or if it was a contributor to their ability to pursue their aspirations.
  - 2.2 To identify any personal barriers, obstacles, limitations, conflicts, or difficulties that each individual experienced and overcame, whether they be financial, mental, emotional, physical etc.
- 3 To understand the motivations and emotions behind fulfilling their aspirations, including what previously and/or currently motivates them to do what they enjoy and what feelings they experience as a result.
  - 3.1 To determine what motivates each individual and group in doing what they enjoy and with that, explain their ‘why’ for doing what they do.
  - 3.2 To determine the emotions that contribute and come from them being able to fulfill their aspirations, if they are more positive, and any other emotions they may have felt in the process.
- 4 To assess the personal qualities, attributes, and characteristics that contribute and enable them to be successful, to continue forward, and to accomplish their aspirations.
  - 4.1 To explain the personal attributes, qualities, and characteristics that each individual and group have, which will also come from how they overcame any barriers or limitations identified from objective 2.
  - 4.2 To study and explore some of the soft skills that the individuals possess and attribute to being important to their success.

### **3. Methods**

This empirical study utilized a qualitative methodology, applying interpretive and analytical procedures to approach the study’s objectives. The technique of thematic content analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyze the nine semi-structured interviews conducted. Participants were either adults in academia, dancers, or

volunteers, whose career, or volunteer work, they thoroughly enjoyed. The use of thematic analysis was most appropriate as it allowed the flexibility to look at research questions, or set objectives, by abstracting the patterned responses, and could be data or theory driven, therefore with the support of previous literature, enabling both inductive and deductive processes in the data analysis (Ashby and Schoon, 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2006). A use of a hierarchical themed map allowed for the themes and sub-categories to best be displayed in how they answered the study's objectives and research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

### **3.1. Participants**

Participants for the interviews were contacted and recruited via in person, through email, or telephone and were informed of the study. A mix of convenience sampling and snowball selection, on a basis of who the primary researcher had access to, were utilized to reach the sample size. Nine participants, females (n = 4; 44.4%) and males (n = 5; 55.6%) gave their consent to take part in the study. There were three participants in each group: academics; dancers; and volunteers. They were pre-screened to ensure they fell respectfully into the category of either academic, dancer, or volunteer, had the experience and met the determined criteria in order to answer this study's aims and research question. The criteria for each group are detailed below as well as the participants profiles and a summary of such in **Table 1**.

#### **3.1.1. Academics**

The criteria were professors at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, from various faculties, who actively engaged in current research, and have more than 20 publications in Google scholar. This was to ensure a high level of experience, excellence, and engagement in their careers to assume that they were dedicated and enjoyed their careers. One of the academics was previously known to the researcher, while the other two were chosen at random after compiling a list of 40 possible participants that had met the criteria above. The academics came from the fields of social psychology, philology, and biology, with a mean of roughly 28.33 years of experience ( $\pm 12.58$ ). One academic was female and the other two were males. Both male participants decided over time in their later youth and young adulthood to pursue a career in academia after various experiences in the field of research and discovery. The female participant knew from her childhood she wanted to be a professor and dedicate her life to teaching and researching. All of the academics were currently actively engaged in teaching and research at the university.

#### **3.1.2. Dancers**

The criteria were elite professional dancers from Esencia Studios in Madrid, who teach weekly classes, participate in teaching at various events and dance congresses in Spain and internationally around the world, and who have either participated or won dance competitions. Two of the participants were the researchers' current dance teachers and therefore previously known, while the other participant was

a close friend of theirs and a current instructor at the academy. The dancers came from the styles of Latin dance, mainly bachata, kizomba, and zouk and had a mean of around 13 years of experience ( $\pm 1.73$ ). One dancer was female and the other two were male. The female participant had taken what is considered a conventional route in the dance profession, starting at the age of seven with ballet classes and knew that she wanted to dedicate her life to dancing. On the other hand, both male participants had made the decision later in their early twenties. All dancers had previously competed and won many competitions. They also were the owners of a dance academy, two having opened the academy Esencia Studios, and another had previously opened an academy in Australia. All dancers were also currently teaching weekly classes and traveling almost every weekend to teach at various dance congresses.

### 3.1.3. *Volunteers*

The criteria were people who actively engage in volunteer work weekly in any volunteer organization and have more than four years of volunteer experience. One of the volunteers was an acquaintance of the researcher, while another was their friend in common, and the last was a friend of the researcher's tutor where they had conducted their previous internship. Due to the difficulties in obtaining participants with the above criteria, this method was found to be the most convenient. The volunteers came from the Red Cross and Scouts and had around 6.66 years of experience ( $\pm 2.52$ ). Two volunteers were female, and one was male. Both female participants had decided to start volunteering in their later adulthood, while the male participant had decided to volunteer in their later youth after going through the program themselves. All participants were highly motivated and passionate about volunteering.

**Table 1.** *Individual Profile of Interviewees*

<i>Interviewees</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Origin</i>	<i>Field of expertise</i>	<i>Experience (years)</i>
Academic.M1	Male	55-64	Spain	Social Psychology	$\approx 40$
Academic.F2	Female	55-64	Spain	Philology	$\approx 30$
Academic.M3	Male	35-44	Spain	Biology	$\approx 15$
Dancer.F1	Female	25-34	Spain	Bachata/Kizomba	$\approx 15$
Dancer.M2	Male	25-34	Peru	Bachata	$\approx 12$
Dancer.M3	Male	25-34	Brazil	Zouk	$\approx 12$
Volunteer.F1	Female	45-54	Spain	Red Cross	$\approx 7$
Volunteer.F2	Female	45-54	Spain	Red Cross	$\approx 9$
Volunteer.M3	Male	18-24	Spain	Scouts	$\approx 4$

## 3.2. **Materials**

### 3.2.1. *Semi-structured interview*

A script of 20 questions, five questions for each of the four objectives, was established to make sure the key aims of the study would be obtained. The four different categories of this study were as follows: first objective regarding the decision process (e.g., “When did your aspirations to go into academia/dance/volunteer work begin?”); the second objective regarding barriers, obstacles or limitations (e.g., “Can you describe

the challenges you face in your career/volunteer experience?"); the third objective regarding motivations and emotions (e.g., "What motivates you to do what you do in academia/dance/volunteer?" and "What feelings have you been able to experience as you have fulfilled what you aspire?"); and the fourth objective regarding personal qualities (e.g., "What qualities would you identify that have helped you get to this point?"). However, depending on the answers that were given, only a couple of the questions for each objective were asked and the interview was left open for the researcher to ask any further questions to probe for any more information if it was necessary (Aujla & Farrer, 2015). A copy of all the scripted questions for the interview are provided in the appendices section under **Appendix A**.

### **3.3. Procedure**

In qualitative research, as there are no set rules and the research design is not universal and the accessibility to the research population is limited, a small sample size of 6-12 participants is sufficient to reach saturation (Baker et al., 2012). Therefore, nine participants were determined to allow for enough substance and variance to be achieved amongst the groups and sample. Seven of the participants were from Spain and two were from Latin America. All participants were living in Madrid or in the outskirts.

All participants after being previously screened and selected based on the criteria above, were acquainted with the aims and objectives of this study and procedure for their participation. Once satisfied, each of the participants gave their verbal consent to participate and a date for the interview to be conducted was established based on the conveniences of both parties. Eight of the participants' native language was Spanish, while one of the participant's native language was Portuguese, however they were multilingual and fluent in Spanish as well. As the researcher also had proficiency in Spanish, to ensure congruence across the interviews and analysis, all interviews were conducted in Spanish. The interviews followed closely after the procedures done in the study by Aujla & Farrer (2015), due to its exploratory nature, and were semi-structured, following a flexible script of 20 questions. Depending on the responses given, only some of the questions from the script were asked while other follow up questions allowed for further clarity. Participants were informed that there are no right or wrong answers, that they can take their time to respond, and that they could ask for further clarification on any question if necessary (Aujla & Farrer, 2015). Four of the interviews were conducted in person, while two interviews were done over a video call through Google meets, and three interviews were held over the phone. Participants that were not able to meet in person were either due to convenience or living further away. The interviews were recorded using the voice recorder on the researcher's phone or tablet with permission from the participants and lasted between 20-40 minutes ( $\pm 6.08$ ). After the interview, participants were thanked for their time and contribution and told that they may contact the researcher if they wish to follow up on the study and know of any of the results and conclusions that are obtained. Afterwards, the researcher transcribed each interview verbatim on a word document on the computer to later upload each interview document to the software ATLAS.ti for further data analysis (Aujla & Farrer,

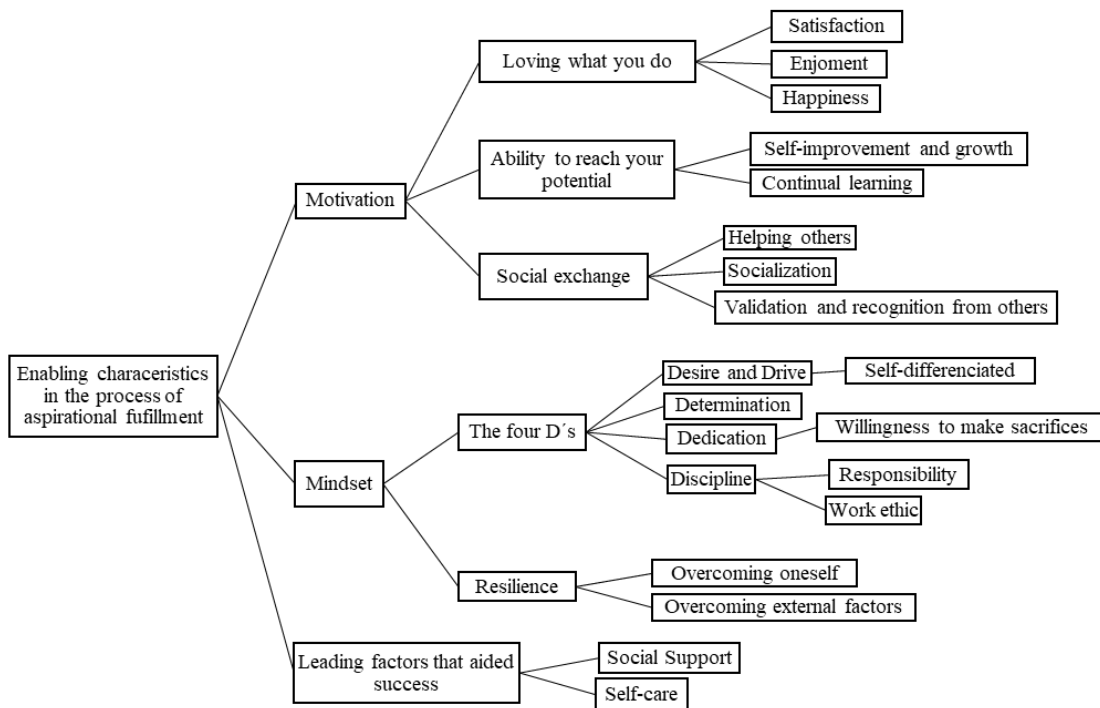
2015; Middleton, 2017). Lastly, as a form of gratitude and appreciation for their participation, the researcher made hand-made thank you cards, enclosing one of their own personal quotes from the interview that made an impact on the researcher. A list of each of these quotes can be found in the **Appendix B**.

### **3.4. Data analysis**

Regarding the analysis of the semi structured interviews, the software ATLAS.ti was used to conduct the thematic analysis. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were read and reread to ensure familiarity with the content (Aujla & Farrer, 2015; Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to ensure the documents uploaded to the software were well organized and the participants remained anonymous, they were labeled according to their group, gender, and interview number for that group (e.g., Academic.M2). From the transcriptions, 422 citations were created in total, along with 144 codes in ATLAS.ti, allowing for the common patterns and themes in the data from each interview to be pulled out, according to the objectives of the study. Each interview was coded systematically with equal attention given to each document, and the researcher went back to previously coded interviews as new emerging codes arose (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each main objective was closely analyzed in each interview. The analysis was mostly deductive due to previous literature (Aujla & Farrer, 2015; Ranieri et al., 2016), however it was also inductive due to new information arising from the data. For example, a lot of the motivations of the academics, dancers, and volunteers were familiar, due to the previous literature, while the ability to *self-actualize* and *social exchange* emerged more prominently. Certain personal characteristics such as *dedication*, *discipline*, *responsibility* and a strong *work ethic*, were expected. However new codes that arose were for example, a *willingness to make sacrifices* and being able to *overcome oneself*. Interviews were also examined closely to see which of the 10 soft skills were most prominent. After all interviews were reviewed, a stronger focus was geared towards the broader level of themes by sorting different codes into different grouped themes in order to create main overarching themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were relooked at and refined, by either adding themes together or separating themes, if necessary, as well as interviews reviewed and re-coded in aspects that may have been missed in the process. This was to ensure the actual themes would emerge from the data and that the study's objectives would be answered without becoming the main themes, which is a common mistake in thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The use of the table of co-occurrences between the codes was also used to help determine their relationship and the grouped themes. A thematic map was then created which outlined all the major themes and subthemes as well as a report defining the themes in regard to what was interesting about them and the reasons why through the support of citations from some of the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher has a background and experience in academia, dance, and volunteer work which allowed for an interpretation of the data in an informed way, the analysis went through a peer debriefing to confirm that the results and conclusions are precise.

## 4. Results

The purpose of this study was to examine and understand the process that enables people, in this case, academics, dancers, and volunteers, to fulfill their aspirations. There were three higher order themes that emerged from the data that described these enabling characteristics: motivation; mindset; and leading factors that aided success. These themes, in addition with each of their lower themed categories that were concluded to respond to this study's objectives are outlined below and represented in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** Thematic hierarchical representation of the results

### 4.1. Motivation

This main theme was created from the data regarding essentially ‘why’ the interviewees loved their jobs and felt their job in academia, as a dancer, or volunteer to be motivating and enriching. There were some minor variances between the groups, for example, those in academia were motivated to discover and understand topics of interest as well as teach, while dancers also enjoyed being able to teach, create, self-express, and feel liberated, lastly volunteers strongly enjoyed being able to help others, volunteer in a field of their interest, and stay connected with others. However, even with these slight variations which was expected, all together there were three key categories that were found and concluded: loving what you do; ability to reach your potential; and social exchange.

#### **4.1.1. *Loving what you do***

One of the main motivating factors was simply loving what they did and not being able to imagine doing a job that they did not enjoy, especially when their jobs is what would occupy most of their time: “I can not imagine working in something that I do not like,... because I think of all the hours that you spend in something that you do not enjoy, for me... it does not exist” (Dancer.F1). Another said:

“I can not do something that I am not motivated to do, and do not like. I am not going to do it just for the money... I can not and that is why dancing is something that makes me very happy, it gives me a lot of joy, the satisfaction of teaching, and being there” (Dancer.M3).

Loving what they did was far more important than the financial aspect of their careers. Similarly, another mentioned, “If you invest a lot and you do not like what you do, it is not something positive and favorable. You have to like what you do, and you have to like the people you do it with” (Volunteer.M3). The participants recognized all the time and dedication that went into their careers or volunteer work and that it was therefore important that they love what they did and felt passion for it. To do something they did not enjoy would be pointless to their time and energy which they valued very much. Their motivation was very intrinsic, coming from within themselves and the sensations they experienced as a result of doing what they enjoyed. Some even mentioned feeling that they were born for this, while others discovered along the way that it was something that they loved. Along with loving what they did, three lower categories were found in relation: satisfaction; enjoyment; and happiness.

##### **4.1.1.1. Satisfaction.**

Satisfaction and the sense of fulfillment was a very prominent emotion felt amongst all the interviews and groups. Their careers or work as volunteers was very gratifying whether it was because they could dive deeper into topics of their interest and fulfill their curiosity, or their jobs allowed them to make a difference in the lives of others which therefore gave them a sense of fulfillment:

“I think when I enjoy the most is when I understand things, when I discover different ways of approaching the human world in general, not in psychological aspects. That's probably the element, I really think what gives me pleasure in the academic world and I think it's the moments that I can spend hours reading and going deep into a topic, reflecting without a formal purpose, that is that aspect of discovery, of knowing, of connecting with the past, with what other people have said without a function of writing a book, an article, to give a class, but simply to discover is the most satisfying part of my work” (Academic.M1).

“My aspirations were to have a good job and to live peacefully doing something that I liked... Now I really enjoy mentoring and things that I did not discover until I had spent more time dedicating myself to this and

it turns out that they are the things that I find more fulfilling than work”  
(Academic.M3).

In addition, getting to pursue their passion and share it with others allowed those they worked with to accomplish and achieve their goals which was satisfying to know they played a role in that: “I think feelings of peace, of harmony. I think happiness and satisfaction... When you get messages from people saying ‘hey thanks to you, I have achieved that’” (Dancer.M3). Oftentimes their careers also allowed them to step out of their comfort zones, try new things, reach their goals, which in turn was very fulfilling and satisfying. Furthermore, there was a satisfying feeling of gratitude in being able to align their passions and interests with their careers or volunteer work. One mentioned “I did social work when I was older... I did an internship there [at the Red Cross] and then I discovered that I could do social work as a volunteer... I got hooked on volunteering” (Volunteer.F2).

#### **4.1.1.2. Enjoyment.**

Similarly, to the emotion of satisfaction and fulfillment was the pure enjoyment they felt from doing what they were most passionate about, even if that meant having to work extremely hard along the way and experience tough moments. One had mentioned taking on various jobs: “They were hard years with a lot of work because I had so many jobs, but I do not regret it at all because it was really what I wanted to do, and I really enjoyed it” (Academic.F2). Another mentioned how even with the exhaustion from all the traveling they do every weekend to teach at events around the world, the moment that they were there teaching and pursuing what they love, they enjoy it completely and it is all worth it. The enjoyment they felt also came from being able to be present and be completely oneself: “It is the most humbling feeling, many times when I am dancing socially with friends and people, just this feeling of freedom, of peace, and that I can be myself at this moment” (Dancer.M3). In many ways their careers also gave them opportunities to pursue an even deeper passion of theirs that they enjoyed being either to teach, to discover, to help, or to create.

“I dance because it has always been something creative, that is what I have liked the most... More than dancing, I like to create things, sensations, feelings, that is what fascinates me the most...and I do it now through dance” (Dancer.M2).

#### **4.1.1.3. Happiness.**

Another aspect that emerged in the data when they spoke of enjoying what they did was the feelings of happiness and joy they were able to experience. This emotion was not only because they felt happy, but also because of the happiness that it gave to others which then filled them with even more happiness as a result: “In the end you take something with you, something remains, you keep the joy of that child” (Volunteer.F1). There is pure happiness that they described is felt when they are doing what they love, and they are doing it well. They also understood the importance of being happy throughout the process: “That you are happy, because in the end, if you are not happy

during the process, it is not worth it” (Academic.F2). In the end, happiness is a strong motivating emotion that is a reason why they choose to do what they enjoy as their careers or volunteer work and compels them to continue their pursuit, no matter the obstacles along the way.

#### **4.1.2. Ability to reach your potential**

Another common motivating factor that emerged was being able to reach their potential, in other words, being able to self-actualize. They were motivated to push themselves, aspire for greatness, to set goals for themselves, see how far they could go and never stop self-fulfilling.

“The goal was to see how far I could go when I first started to dedicate myself to this. I am not going to limit myself to anything. I am going to try to continue as far as I can go and reach... I want to be one of the best in this and I am going to do everything I can to achieve it” (Dancer.M2).

Likewise, to being able to reach their potential, was the comprehension of needing to stay authentic and to not lose themselves in their careers. While it was important to keep up with what was current, in doing so meant also staying true to themselves along the way and to not try to be better than anyone else but themselves. Similarly, they mentioned how their careers and volunteer work allowed them to develop skills such as communication, teamwork, humility, prioritization, and being flexible, which allowed them to continue in their personal development. Therefore, there were two lower categories that were found to support them being able to reach their own potential: self-improvement and growth; and continual learning.

##### **4.1.2.1. Self-improvement and growth.**

The interviewees each had an attitude of self-improvement and growth, to always aim for more and to be better each day. This meant having goals and objectives and even when they reached excellence to continue striving for more. “I became obsessed with improving and it was a continuous obsession that I got up every morning to improve... and it was incredible” (Dancer.M2). Another even said, “Continuing to improve as a dancer is always, always an objective” (Dancer.W1). Their attitude of self-improvement was also very positive and did not come from being too hard on themselves or seeking to be perfect but to simply step out of their comfort zone, take the actions to be their best, and make it happen. “To be excellent without seeking perfection, learning from your mistakes... you can only go on if you have the will, and the will is only created by doing” (Academic.F2). Similarly, their careers challenged them positively which enabled self-improvement:

“I understand the academic career as a challenge... I am always trying to understand the world and especially social psychology, which is exciting. So, from a positive point of view, practically since I started as an intern until now, for me it has been a permanent challenge. Then on another level but also important, the challenge of doing better classes, of

directing better research work, that for me has always been positive” (Academic.M1).

They also knew that their ability to improve positively impacted their ability to teach better and to transmit their knowledge to their students. One mentioned, “My aspirations have always been to be better and better and to try to teach better and to help better and that is a fascinating path” (Academic.F2). Likewise another said:

“My inspiration is to wake up everyday and work on myself, because the pandemic taught me that I can no longer plan for one year, two years, three years, because you never know... So I live day by day and focus to bring my best, make different classes, focus on other styles, changes of environment, and to bring the best to my students. So that motivates me because it is bringing me different knowledge and a different language to communicate with people” (Dancer.M3).

#### **4.1.2.2. Continual learning.**

Similarly, to their attitude to strive to be better, they understood the importance of continual learning and that it is a process that never ends. Being life-long learners meant that they had acquired the soft skill of *flexibility*, as they were adaptable, had a willingness to change, and were easily teachable. What made this so important was due to the impact that their learning had not only on themselves but also on others. Their increased knowledge and experience is what enabled them to share that and show up better for others. “I have never stopped studying, looking for excellence, and quality content to pass on to my students... I always try to add more value” (Dancer.M3). Many developed habits to continue their development. Those in academia would take time to continue reading, learning, pondering topics of interest, and aim to continue discovering: “Fundamentally reading habits is the central habit of success for me” (Academic.M1). While dancers would practice over and over again, continue to take classes themselves, and also study their art and body. The ability to continue learning also came from the variety their jobs offered and the challenges that it positively gave them to continue improving:

“One thing is that the work motivates me a lot because it is not the typical job where you are constantly doing the same thing... I never saw myself doing a job that was super monotonous. That is to say, to always have a challenge... to face something you have no idea about and understand it... that motivation is what has allowed me to overcome all the complicated or perhaps personal moments” (Academic.M3).

#### **4.1.3. Social exchange**

Lastly, another main motivating factor that arose was the theme of social exchange. Their jobs or volunteer work allowed them to help other people, it also allowed them to socialize, experience human connection, create community, and build relationships. In doing so would not only leave them feeling fulfilled but even more so,

feeling validated and recognized for their work when others would express and show their appreciation. It was a full circle of being able to give to others and also gaining in return:

“The motivation in the end comes from different points, for example on the one hand because I am with people that I get along well with who are my friends. While I am working with them, they give me much more encouragement” (Volunteer.M3).

#### **4.1.3.1. Helping others.**

Being able to help others was a fundamentally motivating lower theme. It allowed them to feel like they were making a difference in the lives of others and contributing to the greater good. It also enabled them to help in solving problems through projects they had created alone or with their colleagues and to be able to see them through. Many of the participants had showed having the soft skill of *interpersonal skills*. One interviewee said, “I can create an alternative environment for the kids... a point of alternative leisure and social community” (Volunteer.M3). Similarly another said, “I love helping women. I love to help them get out of those deep places where they are stuck and of course doing that makes me feel very good” (Volunteer.F1). Realizing the role that they were playing in helping the lives of others was very fulfilling: “I am motivated by the fact that there are people, families who have difficulties and that I can help them to get the best out of it” (Volunteer.F2). Similarly, another commented:

“I have messages from people who had depression or things like that and that a class they had with me in a way has changed their chip or people with body pain, physical pain and they changed too... I did my job well... from a thousand people and I can change a little bit of a person, that is already a satisfaction of happiness seeing it accomplished... that is joy” (Dancer.M3).

In addition, being able to share their passion and help others gain passion and desire for it as well was also very fulfilling. In the end, it also enabled them to help others gain autonomy and confidence. One interviewee said, “My intention has always been to use dance as a tool to help people, not necessarily to learn to dance, but what comes after the dance” (Dancer.M3). Likewise, others mentioned:

“That is what keeps me excited and keeps me trying new things, seeing how...and when the students really get hooked on the subject and I see that they enjoy it and that they try to solve things on their own, I am happy” (Academic.F2).

“Dancing changed my life...it is my life, my whole life is dancing...so the fact that I can offer that makes me very excited and now I especially focus on teaching people well, that they have good technique, that they do not hurt themselves, that they control their body, that they find their style” (Dancer.F1).

#### **4.1.3.2. Socialization.**

In addition to the sense of fulfillment in helping others, having the ability to simply socialize with other people, engaging in human connection, was also quite rewarding: “Volunteering is very rewarding because you meet so many wonderful people, and you suddenly know yourself as well. You do not know what you are capable of giving to others until you give it” (Volunteer.F1). Another mentioned how part of their inspiration came from others: “I think it is from the community, from the people that is what inspires me the most. I really like to dance, but I also like to teach” (Dancer.M3). Furthermore, there was enjoyment with being able to work alongside with others: “I am a very sociable person, so I enjoy working with others...and working in a team, working with honesty, expecting the best from others and giving my best” (Academic.F2). Being able to socialize and be with others in their careers or as volunteers was also seen to stay connected with people and to create friendships that went beyond their typical work environment. Likewise being in contact with people from different generations was seen as very stimulating:

“Contact with younger people... it always keeps you mentally renewed, but because there is a certain tendency towards cynicism as you get older and that is one of the elements that repels me the most in the academic world...so in my courses there are always students that generate a certain debate, they propose some things that excite me, so that is also a motivating element” (Academic.M1).

#### **4.1.3.3. Validation and recognition from others.**

Similarly, to being fulfilled by helping others and socializing was the aspect of gaining validation and recognition from others. This was not necessarily something that they sought after, yet when it was felt and experienced, they mentioned it to be a motivating factor. From the work that they had done as academic professors, dance teachers or volunteers, when they had sensed or were told that there was someone who appreciated it, or was grateful, it was a very rewarding feeling: “What makes me most excited is when people tell me ‘I started dancing because of you’” (Dancer.F1). Part of what made this rewarding was because they knew the impact that their passions had on them in their lives, one mentioning it to be life changing. Therefore, seeing their students gain and feel that same passion not only validated what they felt and experienced but also brought closeness and connection in sharing that sameness. In a similar manner, another said:

“When you feel that you have done something and people have liked that you have written a book or published an article or given a class or a conference and you feel there is a grateful person, this is very stimulating and very motivating in the academic world” (Academic.M1).

Furthermore, gaining validation and recognition from others, especially those they admired, not only increased confidence but allowed them to recognize their worth: “[When] people that you respect, that you admire, believe in you, believe in your work,

that is when you give value to your work” (Dancer.M2). Additionally, gaining validation and recognition also helped them to continue onward:

“I want to keep improving, both for the people who follow us, as well as for the students we have here because I have to...teaching makes me keep innovating, inventing, and practicing. We did a choreography a month and a half ago, and I can not for several reasons do something easy because I have to set the level high for my students, and for me. I want my students to be proud of their teachers” (Dancer.F1).

## **4.2. Mindset**

This second main theme was created from the data to embody the approach, mentality, and skills that the academics, dancers, and volunteers held which enabled them to not only go for their aspirations, however, to also approach obstacles and limitations along the way with a *positive attitude*, a soft skill seen in all the participants:

“Even though you enjoy your profession, there are good moments and bad moments, so you can not avoid the bad ones, that is to say you have to be there, they have to happen because it is a process. I even believe that it is necessary to go through the bad moments so that when the good ones come, you value them more and enjoy them more” (Dancer.F1).

Their positive attitude and mindset were crucial to making their dreams, aspirations, and goals an actual reality. It meant, having perspective, being patient with themselves, learning from their mistakes and normalizing their errors as being a part of the process, going for it without fear, and putting in the hard work to get there. There were two lower themed categories that emerged from the data to exemplify their mindset: the four D's; and resilience.

### **4.2.1. The four D's**

The four D's is what describes the qualities and attributes that the academics, dancers, and volunteers exuded to be able to pursue what they enjoyed and aspired. It is what also contributed to their ability to be successful and not give up when facing obstacles and challenges along the way. The first was having the *desire and drive*. This meant being able to have the drive to go for it and make their desires come to pass and being self-differentiated. Secondly, was having *determination* and focus as they worked towards their goals. Thirdly, was possessing great *dedication* which allowed them to make the sacrifices necessary along the way. Finally, was the quality of solid *discipline*, which also entailed being responsible and having a strong work ethic.

#### **4.2.1.1. Desire and Drive.**

Desire and drive were where it all started and was one of the most important enabling factors. When academics, dancers, and volunteers had the desire to pursue their aspirations, whether that be at a very young age or something they discovered as they were older, they had the drive to make the decision and take the steps necessary to make

it happen: “I was seven years old when I started dancing...they opened a school near my house and I told my parents I wanted to go” (Dancer.F1). Similarly others said:

“I was born with it, when I was a child, I took my dolls and sat them as if they were students and taught them. I do not remember my age, I was very young. Later, as a teenager, I earned money and gave private lessons, so I have been teaching my whole life” (Academic.F2).

“Before finishing my degree, I went to central America for two years. What I saw there, there was a war starting and I had many intense experiences and when I came back I wanted to study it. But without the intention of dedicating myself to academic life, I simply wanted to know what was the process of socialization in the war and when I finished my career, I asked for a scholarship, they gave it to me and well, everything went smoothly after that” (Academic.M1).

One participant even mentioned how they knew how crucial this was and how many people have the desire and want to do something, but they do not make the decisions to go for it. Their drive is what enabled them to keep fighting for what they wanted: “If you have a vocation and desire for something, be open and do not stop fighting for it” (Academic.F2). Similarly another said, “I was twenty-four when I really decided I wanted to dance, I want to make a living from this, and I am going to try, or die trying” (Dancer.M2). Their drive was not only what empowered them to go for it but also what sustained them along the way: “I said [to myself], look I am going to dedicate myself 100% to this, and since then, I am still here, I have never stopped” (Academic.M3).

#### ***4.2.1.1.1. Self-differentiated.***

Along with having the desire and drive all the participants were highly self-differentiated, which played a role in their abilities to choose to do what they loved. Their decision to pursue their aspirations came from within themselves and were not influenced by the opinions of their families or close friends. This was highly central because in the end, they were doing it for themselves and they knew their ‘why’. This is seen in the follow quotations:

“Simply that you start without fear, without fear of what people will say, that you remove or resolve as much as possible all those fears, what people will say, that this is not good [enough], because if you have not tried it you do not know if it is good or not. And be faithful to the talent or what you want to offer” (Dancer.M2).

“Putting down on paper what you want and why you want it. Because I think the most important thing is to know why you want to do it. One thing I saw, you learn to write down what you want and ask why. And within this why, put another why, and put about five whys in there until you really figure out why you want it. Because a lot of times we want to

do it because we saw someone else and I want to do it but that is not really what motivates you to do it. Then there is going to come a point where you are either going to get frustrated, or you are not going to get where you want to go. So, first find out why you want to do it, second make the decision to do it” (Dancer.M3).

#### **4.2.1.2. Determination.**

Just as having the desire and drive to go for what they aspired, they had great determination and held focus towards their goals. Being determined implied being active in seeking out opportunities rather than waiting for them to come. Even if they did not have all the financial resources, it meant having persistence and a strong will to fight for what they wanted, and not let that barrier deter them. The following quotations show their determination and firmness in finding the opportunities and even a bit of the sacrifices they were willing to make:

“I have talked to dancers and I have said, look, at your couch at home, opportunities are not going to come to you, you have to look for them yourself. Try one way, if you see that it does not work, try another” (Dancer.F1).

“I had to fight a little bit more... I had to take buses, fifteen hours to go to classes, I had events that I talked to the organizers of [and said] `hey I do not have money to pay for the festival but I want to learn, tell me what I can do, I will work in the festival, just let me be able to take the classes”(Dancer.M3).

“I told her that I would really like to stay at the university and be a teacher and the truth is that she did not know me at all. I did not have any recommendations, I did not have anything. But she welcomed me with open arms, she told me that there was no position at the moment but if I wanted to collaborate with them as a researcher in projects, she would give me a table, a chair, and a computer. Of course I could not get paid. I said yes without any hesitation because that was what I really wanted [to do]” (Academic.F2).

#### **4.2.1.3. Dedication.**

Dedication, just like determination, goes hand in hand. The participants had strong dedication and devotion to their careers or work as volunteers. This dedication meant putting in the time and effort necessary: “One positive thing about me is I know that by working I will achieve things. In other words, by making an effort, sacrifice, work, dedication, I know that I am going to achieve things” (Dancer.F1). Similarly, another mentioned even how their persistence and devotion to their careers enabled them to stand strong in the midst of challenges: “I am quite persistent and I dedicate the hours that I have to dedicate so it is difficult for me to fall down in this aspect because of the discouragement” (Academic.M1). Likewise, dedication also entailed their careers or

work as volunteers as being high in their priorities and feeling a sense of obligation and loyalty to it:

“It is true that the time you dedicate... you can not dedicate to other things, for example on weekends I could not go anywhere with my family or my friends because I had it dedicated to the Scouts, but in the end my responsibility outweighed what I wanted to do with my family or friends” (Volunteer.M3).

#### **4.2.1.3.1. Willingness to make sacrifices.**

With such dedication, comes the willingness or ability to make sacrifices. This was seen throughout all the interviews as they showed sacrifice after sacrifice that they were willing to make and oftentimes, that were unknown to others. Academics would work extremely hard, take on different positions, have moments of usability, and even have to take job offers in other countries to gain experience until something permanent came along. Likewise, dancers would work hard and teach classes in various academies until building up to a more stable position as well. The life of a dancer also implied not having a normal everyday life or career due to nights being dedicated to work and teaching classes and the daytime to working on themselves, on their business, and constantly practicing and even traveling the world to teach in various dance congresses. Similarly, volunteers showed how they were willing to sacrifice their weekends and extra time. All of these sacrifices also came with not having much free time, giving up some of their personal life and not always being able to be present at family events. However even with the sacrifices, knowing that it was part of the process and knowing their ‘why’ behind it all, made it a lot easier: “Know that there are sacrifices, that there are difficulties, that not everything is a thousand wonders but know what you want and why you want it” (Dancer.M3). Likewise, another spoke on the difficulties in making sacrifices to follow their dream:

“I had a very difficult time when I was working abroad and I had two unpleasant family situations in the course of a month and a half and the feeling of not being present and not being with the family at those times, that was hard, not because I was not there because I was thousands of kilometers away. So that is one thing that even, let's say that you still do not forgive yourself, you feel a little bit selfish because you say well I did what I could, but I could always do more and I did not do it because I was following my personal dream. Instead of having sacrificed a little bit of that, to be in those moments with the family” (Academic.M3).

#### **4.2.1.4. Discipline.**

Next to dedication, was the ability to be disciplined in what they did. Many mentioned how it was key in achieving their goals and success: “There is no other way to get there, a lot of will, a lot of discipline and a lot of work. There are no secrets” (Academic.F2). Another also said: “I made it because of my work, my dedication, my discipline” (Dancer.M3). Their discipline meant being able to follow a schedule and routine that

also outlined their priorities and short term goals, and then doing everything in their power to stick to it. In one of the interviews they even mentioned how falling off from that routine made everything else in their life a lot more difficult and so keeping to it also meant being more grounded and having the ability to excel in other areas. Discipline was an attribute that was not only seen in their careers, or in being able to follow a routine, but also impacted other areas of their lives such as being financially discipline and smart with money, not spending more than what they were making, being able to save, and make the best of what they had: “I have saved a lot, thanks to that we have been able to set up the school [dance academy]” (Dancer.F1). With discipline came other important qualities, the soft skills of *responsibility* and *work ethic*.

#### **4.2.1.4.1. Responsibility.**

Being responsible meant being accountable, reliable and conscientious. Many expressed being responsible as a personal quality that they had and felt was important in their careers or volunteer work. Being responsible meant also sharing responsibility as a team:

“All the people who work here, each one does their job and when there were moments of crisis, each one took a part of the responsibility, and we have all tried to overcome the problem and it has gone well for the time being” (Dancer.F1).

Similarly, they knew that their devotion to their careers or volunteer work entailed being self-disciplined and responsible, even when they felt exhausted or did not feel like it: “I have to break the laziness because if...in the end I do not go, in the end you undo things and you can not afford to help others when they need you” (Volunteer.F1). On a similar note, another shared:

“Now we have a lot of work, we are very happy, but it also brings a lot of stress, and many, many times you want to rest or you want to be with your family, and you can not because you have to work, so it is complicated but we are very fortunate” (Dancer.F1).

#### **4.2.1.4.2. Work Ethic.**

Next to being responsible was having a strong work ethic. They understood the importance of working hard, being self-motivated, taking initiative and putting in all the effort necessary. One mentioned in the end to summarize the interview that, “Hard work has its rewards, if you invest, you win” (Dancer.F1). This attitude of a strong work ethic was seen amongst all the interviews. They were willing to make sacrifices, to go through the process and all the stages, to practice, to continue learning, and to put in all the work. They also understood that talent or passion could only get them so far, most importantly was working for it:

“You can have talent, but if you do not work, you will not get there...there are people who have less talent than other people but they

work harder so they will get further than the person who has talent but does not work” (Dancer.F1).

#### **4.2.2. Resilience**

This theme emerged from the data when examining how the academics, dancers, and volunteers were able to withstand and adjust to the challenges encountered along the way. Their ability to be resilient also came from their positive mindset and outlook towards their future and goals. They understood that it was not an easy road, that there were many difficulties and sacrifices that were part of the process. There were two lower themes that they showed much resilience to: overcoming oneself and overcoming external factors.

##### **4.2.2.1. Overcoming oneself.**

Being resilient and having the ability to overcome oneself was very prominent in all the interviews, both on a mental and physical level. Overcoming oneself mentally, meant not allowing their fears, insecurities, or negative self-chatter stop them from pursuing what they enjoyed and overcoming insecurities of comparison and pressure that they would put on themselves:

“The worst challenge I have had is to overcome myself or fight with my insecurities: nobody is going to like this because this sucks, because this is horrible, this is worthless, and fight against that... It takes many years to have the confidence to believe in yourself. I think it has been my worst internal conflict. My worst threat, my worst fear has always been myself” (Dancer.M2).

“I would get very negatively down, you are not good enough, that is wrong, that is not it. So I had a lot of that feeling of comparison, that feeling of not being accepted, of what do I have to do to be accepted here, or trying a lot to be a copy, or copy something, or wanting to be a person or something that I am not” (Dancer.M3).

Even with their insecurities and internal conflicts, they were able to overcome them through hard work: “To overcome your fears and insecurities takes discipline, hard work, and to not lose focus” (Dancer.M2). Likewise, one also mentioned the importance of practice, repetition, being patient, and making a lot of mistakes which enabled them to overcome themselves. Similarly, to overcoming their fears and insecurities, was also the ability to gain resilience as they underwent much stress and experienced mental fatigue due to so many worries and problems to be solved. They also had emotional resilience when faced with emotions such as frustration, sadness, embarrassment, and loneliness, seeing them with a positive perspective:

“There are feelings of sadness when you do not manage to reach a student for some reason, when you have lost them, and the student gives up and even quits. Those moments are sad, they are not negative because

you have the peace of mind that you have done what you could”  
(Academic.F2).

Lastly, overcoming oneself mentally entailed fighting against the laziness and self-chatter that came with it: “I guess for everyone, there are times when we are lazier and we say that if I am in my armchair watching a series or reading a book, why should I be trying to help others?” (Volunteer.F1).

Another common obstacle in overcoming themselves was physically. Many mentioned feeling exhausted from the demands of their careers or volunteer work or because their careers were also physically demanding in general: “You get tired of giving, giving, giving, accompanying others, helping others” (Volunteer.F1). Even as such, they understood that no matter how tired they felt, they needed to push through: “Even though I am tired, I have to keep going” (Dancer.F1).

#### **4.2.2.2. Overcoming external factors.**

Along with overcoming themselves, they also showed resilience in being able to overcome external factors such as social beliefs and constructs, lack of family support or pressure, and the work environment. Not having the support of their family or friends along their pursuit was a major theme across the interviews. Some even mentioned the difficulties they felt having to miss friends and family birthdays and experiencing them distance themselves, and losing that support for a time being. Many had to gain their respect and support over time: “I had to gain respect from my friends, from my family, who today respect me, but at the beginning, they did not” (Dancer.M3). Oftentimes, this was due to social constructs and beliefs that their families and friends held that either they could not make a living from pursuing such a career, or that they should be more stable in their careers. This is supported in the following quotations:

“My parents obviously wanted me to be in a profession, a profession with security, economic security, stability... Because I have always seen that the world is like that... My parents never supported me from the beginning, then they respected me with facts that I presented: ‘look, I have a job, I have stability, I have a house and so on and it is all because of dancing’. They did not know that option, that is why I do not judge them.” (Dancer.M2).

“I have also had pressure from the family, because the family also puts pressure on you, ‘hey let's see when are you going to stabilize or when are you going to have something more fixed, or are you going to stay there in that country for three years?’” (Academic.M3).

Similarly, other external factors to overcome sometimes came from a hostile environment, as one academic mentioned, and needing to be firm and not get discouraged. While another mentioned how it was not always easy being able to work as a team with others: “There are always problems that you have to know how to solve as best as possible. Teamwork is sometimes complicated to work with so many people”

(Volunteer.M3). Likewise, another even mentioned some slight gender discrimination that they had felt:

“I have achieved respect as a businesswoman, but it has not been easy because they assume that you are going to do worse or that you are not going to do it at all... Personally, as a woman in the world of dance, I have not felt great discrimination, but I do notice certain comments, certain attitudes...they do not think that you can do it or they think that you do not have enough training, or the discipline, or the personality, or the attitude to run something big” (Dancer.F1).

On another note, sometimes external factors to overcome meant needing to complete tasks that felt mundane or that were aspects of their jobs that they did not typically enjoy:

“I dedicate a large percentage of my time to administrative tasks that are not tasks that I enjoy doing. I like to teach, I like to study and I like to do research. Those administrative tasks...sometimes consume up to eighty percent of my time and energy. That has made me despair and say ‘I don't want to be here anymore’. And it has not been because of my profession” (Academic.F2).

“The Red Cross is a worldwide organization but it still has a lot of bureaucracy. You have to do a lot of paperwork... it is tremendous, to be able to give aid to someone, you have to justify the expenses over and over again” (Volunteer.F1).

### **4.3. Leading factors that aided success**

This last main theme was created from the data in seeing how other factors apart from their motivation and mindset were additionally important in enabling them to be successful in pursuing their aspirations: social support; and self-care.

#### **4.3.1. Social support**

Having the support necessary was a leading factor that aided in their success. Those who had the support of their families and friends could not stress it enough in how much it had helped them along the way:

“I think the most important part has been the network of social support. The link of family relationships and friendships sustained me at that time... I think I kept myself with a certain dignity, with a certain firmness and it was the support, fundamentally, of my friends and family that supported me in those difficult moments because it was the central difficulty” (Academic.M1).

“I believe that family is fundamental for any professional and I have been infinitely lucky to have the support, first of all, of my husband,

because it is clear that being married to a researcher and a professor who works twenty-four hours a day without weekends... is complicated, so it is very important who your partner is, fundamental, in a career as intensive as this one” (Academic.F2).

Similarly, another mentioned how with the support of their partner, not only emotionally but also financially, was a crucial aspect during the tough moments of instability in the beginning:

“It was not an easy road and university is a hard road, but in fact I had my husband who had two salaries and I could afford to be with low wages, not making a lot of money... But what I was clear about was that this was what I wanted to do in life, and I also believed that it was what I knew how to do, and I did not want to do anything else. It compensates you for the time you need until you get in” (Academic.F2).

However what was interesting from the interviews is oftentimes they did not always have the full support of their families and friends, which meant finding some kind of support elsewhere, be it other friends, mentors, colleagues, or even their students:

“I have been fortunate that everywhere I have gone I have always had a good support group, friendships that I have made in the places and so on, which in the end helps you in the day to day and so in more complicated moments you always have that... Especially when you are living in another country and you feel a little bit disconnected with your family, with those who were your lifelong friends” (Academic.M3).

Likewise with finding a support system elsewhere, was understanding the importance of the soft skill of *teamwork* in their careers and that they were not in this alone: “We are a team [their dance partner] you know, it is not just me, it is impossible to be alone” (Dancer.F1). Another also mentioned how important teamwork was in working with others and also being able to collaborate positively:

“You learn to communicate better, you learn to work as a team, you learn to work well with different people who think differently than you, and in the end, if you want to achieve something, you have to unite with them and you also have to learn to defend your ideas” (Volunteer.M3).

#### **4.3.2. Self-care**

Self-care was an important aspect that was seen across the interviews. Even though the participants had strong work ethic, dedication to their careers, and even the willingness to make sacrifices, they also were conscientious of the fact that there came times where they needed to also put their health and physical well-being first in order to be successful. For example, one mentioned in order to balance the kind of job they had, which was quite sedentary, they needed to prioritize physical activity and their health, as well as take time to enjoy relationships and human connection:

“Another habit is to keep yourself physically well. It is also important for the academic world which is also very sedentary...I think that is also very important, keep yourself healthy and strong, and in terms of habits, then also enjoy, which is a very important habit, enjoy human relationships, that for academics is also very powerful, in general it is a very serious world, very formal, and people also need that relationship, so that is also a habit that I recommend to have a good time” (Academic.M1).

Another had mentioned that since their job required a lot of impact on the body, that in turn they knew the importance of listening to their bodies and caring for them to prevent injuries: “You have to do a lot of stretching, osteo treatment, physiotherapy, get massages, because there comes a time...sometimes the body says until here” (Dancer.F2). In addition to listening to their bodies, it was also essential to be aware of their mind and mental well-being. This sometimes entailed taking a break, putting away their phone, and having an afternoon to relax, to not think, and to let go and take a breather. This did not always come easy and oftentimes felt like they needed to force themselves to do it, nevertheless, they put themselves first in those moments when they needed it. In a similar manner, another also mentioned the importance of taking time to fill themselves to regain their energy and drive which sometimes meant taking time to themselves to reflect, and read.

Furthermore, another mentioned the importance of having a morning routine in order to stay focused, get the best out of their day, and to keep going:

“I have this routine of working my head, like mind and body, and preparing for the day so that I can move forward... it helps me to have the focus, focus on what I wanted to come because a lot of times the head goes, it is tired, and such” (Dancer.M3).

This consisted of during the first hour, not looking at their phone for the first thirty minutes, having their coffee, meditating, doing some reading or perhaps listening to a podcast. Then they would go to the gym or do some physical activity and after that, start their day. Lastly, a crucial part of self-care meant not just listening to their bodies and minds, however also listening to themselves and understanding their own strengths and qualities so that they could find a balance that worked for them:

“I am the first one who would love to have the power to get up earlier so that I can be at the gym at seven o'clock, so that I can make the most of my day, but I also have other qualities that some people who get up early do not have. So, you have to kind of listen to yourself, get to know yourself, try to make the most of yourself, taking advantage of your qualities... But I am still trying to find the balance between what I would like to do and what I can really afford, and celebrate my achievements, because I am super picky with myself” (Dancer.F1).

## **5. Discussion**

The aim of this study was to explore and understand what has enabled academics, dancers, and volunteers to choose aspiration fulfillment, their motivation to do what they enjoy, important character traits that allowed them to overcome challenges and that contributed to their abilities to be successful, and to highlight some of their emotions. There are three key findings of the present research. First, the results of this research provide supporting evidence that one of the most important and motivating factors to aspiration fulfillment in one's career is loving what you do; in order to progress and stick with it in the long run, passion, enjoyment, and satisfaction are crucial. This present study's results are also consistent with previous research that pursuing one's aspiration also enables the ability to self-actualize, to continue developing in their capabilities, and be able to reach their potential. Similarly, another important motivating factor that this study was able to highlight was the circle of social exchange, which entails helping others, feeling fulfilled, and gaining in turn validation and recognition. What this result therefore implies is just how important human connection and fulfillment is, when it comes to one's career or work experience. It also highlights the strong role that feeling one is making a purposeful difference is to one's motivation. Second, what was a strong enabling factor in their abilities to be successful and overcome obstacles was simply their positive mindset. This influenced certain characteristics that they had which was described as the four D's: desire and drive, determination, dedication, and discipline. They were willing to make sacrifices, and were resilient to overcome, which this current study found to being themselves, both psychologically and physically, as well as not allow lack of family support, pressure, environment, or social beliefs deter them. These results represent the first direct demonstration of character traits that are essential in the process of making the decision to pursue one's aspirations and being able to persevere and succeed. Third, other enabling factors seen were their abilities to seek out necessary social support and prioritize self-care. What makes this so interesting, relates back to the findings this study saw in motivation, highlighting human connection. It is impossible to go through challenges alone and be successful without seeking some form of support and condolence. Likewise, one can have put in all the hard work and be extremely dedicated to their careers, or volunteer work, yet if they do not find a balance, they also cannot be successful. These findings will now further be discussed in their relation to the literature.

### **5.1. Motivation and emotions**

The academics, dancers, and volunteers expressed various factors that motivated them and were essentially their "why" they chose to do what they most enjoy as their career, or unpaid work. All participants loved what they did and had great passion for their work. Passion was a popular theme also seen in previous literature on academics, entertainers, and dancers (Aujla & Farrer, 2015; Cannizzo, 2017; Kostere et al., 2016). The participants valued their time and energy and for that reason could not fathom

dedicating it to something they did not enjoy. Past research on those in the entertainment business similarly describe it as not being able to imagine pursuing anything else other than their dreams and that their jobs were more than just a job, in fact for many it was their whole life (Kostere et al., 2016). Some of the participants in this study described it as such, that their career in dancing or teaching was their whole life. Likewise, academics in a previous study, describe it as their lifestyle (Cannizzo, 2017). This study highlighted how loving what they do, not only allows them to pursue something they are deeply interested in and therefore is intrinsic to them, but also gain much satisfaction, enjoyment, and happiness in the process, which were motivating emotions experienced as a result. Furthermore, their love for what they did was internally so strong that it also contributed to their abilities to overcome challenges and barriers that they faced; just like individuals interviewed in previous studies, quitting was not an option because at the end of the day connecting one's career to their core desires, and what they really wanted to do made it all worth it (Cannizzo, 2017; Kostere et al., 2016). In another sense, loving what you do as your career is a motivation in itself to stick through it in the long run.

The individuals in each group also described their careers or volunteer work as a challenge in itself and something that allowed them to continue on in their personal development and in their ability to reach their potential. They all sought after self-improvement and to never stop learning. Likewise, previous studies on independent dancers and academics saw how managing different roles and working across disciplines enabled growth, variation, and challenges to overcome (Aujla & Farrer, 2015; Cannizzo, 2017). This has also aligned with other previous studies on entertainers who described becoming lifelong learners, seeking improvement, and striving but not expecting perfection, and learning from others as being attributes that contributed to their success in their field (Kostere et al., 2016). Their research also found how fulfilling potential increases aspirations as one gains confidence. It was difficult to examine if similar findings could also be seen in this current study. However, many of the participants in this study highlighted how they gained confidence over time through repetition, staying dedicated, setting goals and objectives, and seeing their hard work pay off and opportunities arriving. For example, one noted not being able to imagine opening their own academy and over time, they did. So, in a way, this does imply how increasing one's potential allows for a broader horizon of open opportunities. The individuals in this study saw their development in their capacities as something quite positive, meaning the ability to learn from one's mistakes, and even normalize them, and in seeking for excellence by being authentic and in competition with no one other than themselves. Thus, in a similar sense, this motivation to reach their potential is also connected to one's mindset, in other words, having the mindset of continual learning and self-improvement is not just a motivating factor, rather also a character trait that enables success.

They also attributed having the ability to influence and help others as well as make a difference as a strong motivating force, which was a pattern that was also seen in previous literature (Aujla & Farrer, 2015; Janus & Misiorek, 2019). Being able to

help and influence others and make a difference in their lives also contributed to the satisfaction and happiness that they felt. Making some form of contribution can therefore be seen as being connected to a greater good. It is purpose driven and gives one's aspirations a different meaning. Participants in this study were motivated to fulfill their aspirations, not just because of what that entailed to them personally, but what contributions and impact that meant to the lives of others. This is an interesting topic to consider in further research on whether other areas of aspirational fulfillment, in other words, other careers also have a social connection to impacting others and contributing to the greater good. In accordance with previous findings that saw the ability to meet other people as a motivating factor in one's career, this study also highlighted how being able to socialize and associate with others who share similar interests all together, brings certain validation and recognition (Aujla & Farrer, 2015). As well as the validation received in seeing others gain happiness or that they were grateful for one's work, is a highly extrinsic motivating factor. These results demonstrate the importance of human connection. Brené Brown, a researcher and author explained it as, connection is why we are all here, and that naturally we are hardwired to connect with others which in turn gives our lives purpose and meaning (2013).

## **5.2. Characteristics in the decision process and in enabling success**

One of the major enabling factors that was seen amongst those interviewed in this study and could be what also differentiated them from others, was their mindset, their positive attitude, and perspective. Another way to describe it is, as having strong hope, optimism, and confidence which previous literature described as being connected to a positive attitude (Froman, 2010; Robles, 2012). This is what gives them the ability to pursue their aspirations, by making the decision, staying determined, dedicated, and focused, and having the resilience to overcome challenges and limitations along the way with greater ease. It all comes down to their mindset. These results are consistent with the claims that having a positive attitude, finding the silver lining, and thinking long term enable greater career success (Kostere et al., 2016). It all starts in the mind, and the participants not only have the mindset to stay positive but also to achieve and succeed through their hard work and dedication. Similarly, the findings in a previous study highlighted the importance of mental skills, such as confidence, optimism, self-awareness, commitment, and self-reflection in understanding one's weakness and strengths, to being what aided in their success (Aujla & Farrer, 2015). They further implied that these mental skills were quite teachable. Thus, another way of describing it could be that the participants also had strong mental skills. Furthermore, interventions in developing a growth mindset in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) have seen much success in their sector, showing how malleable and adaptable our minds can be when developing proper skills, and thinking strategies (Elliott-Moskwa, 2022). Therefore, this demonstrates the evidence that one's mindset can be developed and could be a possible implication strategy in helping others pursue their aspirations.

In connection to one's mindset, the present study found characteristics and traits that are crucial in pursuing aspiration fulfillment and overcoming challenges, described

as the four D's: desire and drive; determination; dedication; and discipline. In regards to desire and drive and also in answering one of this study's objectives, the desire that the individuals experienced was congruent with previous research on the decision process that either was having the desire ever since childhood, meaning that it was something internal that was already there and was not influenced by their environment or upbringing, or a desire that developed through various experiences throughout during their youth or adulthood (Kostere et al., 2016; Super, 1957). There is limited evidence to understand why some individuals are born with it, and others develop the desire over time, however from these findings, these factors did not have a significant influence of importance. In other words, what was most essential was the fact that the individuals arrived at their desire and made the decision to pursue their aspirations. Findings in this study also highlighted how in their decision process, oftentimes there were slight changes overtime and that it was therefore important to stay open. Some of the participants had started a career in physics to later end up in philology. Another was interested more in social psychology as form of intervention to later discovery a greater passion towards the academic world. This was also seen in some of the dancers: one started dancing ballet and later dedicated to Latin styles; and another had previously studied personal training. As it can be seen, their aspirations towards their careers developed over time through the experiences they gained through others and their environment. The participants in this study were also self-differentiated, taking the initiative and not influenced by their family members to change course. In fact, many experienced some kind of pressure from their core social support. These findings support the previous research done on self-differentiation as they made choices that were best for them (Middleton, 2017).

When it came to determination, the participants sought out opportunities, set goals and routines, and stayed focused throughout the process. These findings showed evidence that supports previous literature that gaining success entailed certain psychological factors such as, creating opportunities, being enthusiastic, and being willing to take on new challenges (Aujla & Farrer, 2015). Comparable to determination, is dedication. The individuals had a strong dedication and loyalty to their careers which allowed them to make sacrifices. Being dedicated and making sacrifices were also seen in previous studies which highlighted the ability to know when to decide to do one thing and not another, and to put off the here and now ego gratification by staying open and looking towards the future (Kostere et al., 2016). Together these findings, in support of the previous research, strongly imply how in the pursuit of aspirations, sacrifices will have to be made along the way. Therefore, being able to weigh out, navigate, and balance between conflicting choices which both could be extremely positive are important skills to acquire. For example, such a conflict could be choosing between family time and helping others; both choices are beneficial and equally important, and it is up to the individual to know what feels right in that given moment. Another interesting aspect worth mentioning when it comes to the willingness to make sacrifices and dedication, is that those are the efforts and choices that others are not willing to

make. This study highlights how fulfilling one's aspirations is not easy, but it is possible.

One factor that was lastly seen in the four D's was discipline. Those interviewed in this study were highly disciplined which also was related to having responsibility and having a strong work ethic. These skills, along with a positive attitude, flexibility, teamwork, and interpersonal skills were the most prominent soft skills that surfaced in the results. Other soft skills that arose but were not as predominant were communication, integrity, and professionalism. Robles (2012) mentions in their study how soft skills are cognitive skills, and while they mention their top 10 skills for success in the business sector, it is worth considering the importance of discipline, which in fact can very much be considered a soft skill. Discipline is a mental process, and the study obtained evidence of discipline across two sectors: time management and having a routine; and financial skills. These results were consistent with other studies that highlighted the importance of not only having a routine, but also being able to be realistic in the process to update and make necessary adjustments when circumstances required (Kostere et al., 2016). This requires the ability to the mentally process one's everyday life and even with adjustments, staying consistent along the way, which was something that the participants also had mentioned Likewise, money management skills were also seen in their study and support this study's findings that being disciplined in this area also enables further success. The financial skills that the participants exuded was being able to save and make wise financial decisions, with one mentioning that it was something their parents had taught them at a very young age. Others showed that economic barriers and coming from a lower or moderate socioeconomic status, while it was a limitation, did not stop them from reaching towards their goals. It just meant making sacrifices along the way, such as embarrassing moments of usability and working harder until gaining more security. Altogether, the four D's highlight the characteristics that can be developed to ensure accomplishing one's aspiration.

The other important aspect to mindset that this study concluded was resilience in overcoming two areas: oneself which implied mentally and physically; and other external factors such as lack of support, one's environment, and even socially constructed beliefs. These findings supported this study's aims to understand how these limitations, or barriers played a role in interfering with their ability to fulfill their aspirations and how they were able to overcome them. Whereas past research found emotional resilience, staying committed when confronting setbacks, and learning to accept uncertainty, as important factors in overcoming and gaining success (Aujla & Farrer, 2015; Kostere et al., 2016), this present study has shown how the greatest obstacle that must be overcome in pursuing one's aspirations, is oneself. Overcoming oneself meant gaining confidence and self-belief in one's abilities and not allowing fear, or the insecurities and the self-chatter of not being good enough, or worthy enough stop them from pursuing what they love. Similarly, to previous studies, this study saw how having the confidence came with practice, repetition, and experience (Aujla & Farrer, 2015; Kostere et al., 2016). A reason overcoming oneself is so crucial, is because even if the participants were supported or not, or had a higher socioeconomic status, which

most did not, these obstacles, while being setback and as it was stated in the beginning do not fully impede aspirational development (Gewirth, 1998). However, contrary to what Ambrose (2003) mentioned that external circumstances take greater motivation to overcome than internal circumstances, these findings could argue that they are equally, if not more so difficult and would have to be dependable upon the individual's mindset. Moreover, further research in this area is needed.

### **5.3. How barriers and limitations were overcome**

Likewise, overcoming other external factors in this study was also congruent to the findings in previous literature being either: overcoming social beliefs and realizing that they could make a living with their career; overcoming gender discrimination in their sector; overcoming competitive environments; and overcoming lack of social supports (Aujla & Farrer, 2015; Kostere et al., 2016; Ranieri et al., 2016). All participants faced one or many of these challenges and setbacks, yet they stood firm, patient, and dedicated. Even if at times the socially constructed beliefs, such as what is considered a valuable and stable career, caused them to doubt, they kept moving forward. When gender discrimination and certain attitudes were felt, they got to work and showed what they were capable of. When facing competitive environments, they remember to be authentic to themselves. Lastly, when facing a lack of social support, they showed compassion and understanding, stayed steadfast, and worked hard to regain their support and respect by showing them that they could do it. These findings are inspiring and conclude the inevitability of challenges, both personal and external, that are faced along the way and how gaining resilience enables perseverance.

Finally, this study concluded two leading factors that aided success in academics, dancers, and volunteers' pursuit: social support; and self-care. The importance of social support is consistent with the previous literature as being a factor that aided success, as well as the literature that describe lacking social support as being a limitation (Aujla & Farrer; Bandura, 1982, 1994, as cited in Ambrose, 2003). However, interestingly, this study's results found that even when individuals lacked social supports from family members or close friends, they still in some way found a support network around them be it other family or friends, colleagues, or mentors which also aligned with findings from previous literature (Kostere et al., 2016; Ranieri et al., 2016). Another study also described this as finding a supportive network was necessary as overcoming was impossible alone (Kostere et al., 2016). This connects back to the idea of human connectedness as was mentioned previously regarding social exchange being a part of motivation. Likewise, to what Brené Brown mentions to being hardwired for connection, she also goes on to say that without it there is suffering (2012). This supports how social support is necessary not only to overcome but also as a human necessity. Another way in which social support was seen in these results and in previous research was as a means of financial security (Aujla & Farrer, 2015). Being able to rely on the financial support of their partners enabled the ability to go through the period of career instability until gaining a more set position with greater ease. While to others who do not have this kind of support could experience this as a limitation, this factor

only aids success, therefore not having it does not make success unattainable. Many participants of this study showed how they were able to pursue their aspirations, even during such circumstances. This is why gaining discipline in a financial sense and management skills could be beneficial in filling the gap.

Lastly, the other leading factor to success, which was self-care could be interpreted differently across individuals, and even the literature, but all in all means the same. This study's results found self-care as being overall well-being and was different for everyone. While those who had sedentary jobs knew the importance of balancing that demand with physical activity, jobs that were more physical had to balance taking care of their bodies in other ways to prevent injury. Likewise, others saw this as having a morning routine. Together they implied listening to oneself and their needs and finding balance. This supports previous literature that found the importance of seeking a work-life balance, especially when workload was very demanding (Kostere et al., 2016; Ranieri et al., 2016). Similarly, the careers in the sectors of academia, dance, and volunteer work are noted to experience at some point, burn out which is why finding work-life balance and the ability to self-care an essentiality (Janus & Misiorek, 2019; Kostere et al., 2016; Ranieri et al., 2016).

#### **5.4. Implications and limitations**

These findings can be used, not just for enriching the literature in the academic world, but also as a way of transference and as a guide to inspire others and help them fulfill and accomplish their life aspirations. As these findings can be a guide of attributes to be attained, and worked on, such as improving one's mindset and developing the four D's, various workshops can be created as a form of intervention to help implement this. This would be beneficial and effective in the lives of youth in high school as that is the stage when they are often making those career decision on what to study in university. However, these findings are not limited to just that group, as previous research found career development to be a lifelong process (Hansen, 1976), nor should it only impact the groups studied, even with their careers in academia, and as dancers being ordinary. The reason why, is in the beginning of this research a motive was being able to develop a blueprint to follow to inspire the lives of others. These findings from their motivation for example, may be utilized as questions to self-reflect when it comes to the career decision process in pursuing one's aspirations: does this career bring me enjoyment and satisfaction; does this career challenge and enable me to continue growing; does this career enable me to influence and help others? Along with what was just mentioned, being able to recognize the importance of developing a positive mindset and the other character traits that were highlighted in this study are skills and attributes that can be extended across career and other areas of one's life (Robles, 2012). Lastly, many of the themes in this study can be topics for further research, such as exploring more closely how character attributes such as the four D's: desire and drive; determination; dedication; and discipline; are developed. Another possible topic of further research is exploring whether all careers are geared towards

helping others, as social exchange and helping others was seen to be so prominent amongst all the groups in this study.

One of the limitations from this study had to do with the content that was extracted from the volunteers during the interview. What differentiates them from the rest, was not only that they were on the shorter end in duration but also that they were all conducted over the phone, rather than face to face, or by a video call, like the rest of the interviews. This had to do with a matter of convenience, however having the interview over the phone could have impacted being able to connect in the same way and dig deeper on the topics this study examined. Another possible limitation found in this study was how one of the specific objects was to examine the level of self-differentiation in the individual participants. As they were pursuing what they enjoyed most, it was not surprising that they were all self-differentiated. A suggestion for future research could be to compare groups of people that are pursuing their aspiration and others who were not to better observe how high or low self-differentiation plays a role in the career process and in being fulfilled. On a positive note, examining self-differentiation has shown even more so how important it is. Finally, as the study included various objectives and focus, which was essential in understanding the whole process, constraints of time and limited writing space, which would have been much greater if this would have been a topic for a doctoral dissertation, could have limited its ability to go even deeper into each objective. Despite these limitations, this study can be seen as a way of enriching the literature, and inspiring others to fulfill their aspirations, and on a more personal note, a topic the research finds worth developing one day for a book.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

Overall, this study was able to examine, explore, and understand the all-encompassing process that enabled academics, dancers, and volunteers to pursue their aspirations. While some came to that decision at a young age and others over time through experience, the decision process towards aspirational fulfillment is one that grows and expands with time; the individuals in this study confirm why one must stay open to the possibilities that arise. They are also highly self-differentiated showing the importance of staying true to oneself and following their deepest desires. Secondly, they showed how obstacles and challenges such as a lack of family support, economic barriers, or even insecurities, do not impede their pursuit. In fact, they are more easily overcome through a positive mindset, development of the four D's, having a willingness to make sacrifices, soft skills, and through developing resilience. Likewise, their passion and love for what they do, as well as their ability to self-actualize, and help others, plays a strong motivating role to why they enjoy and gain great satisfaction from their careers and volunteer work. Finally, they highlighted the importance of how through the encouragement of social supports and prioritizing self-care, success is surely possible.

## 6. References

- Akosah-Twumasi, P., Emeto, T. I., Lindsay, D., Tsey, K., & Malau-Aduli, B. S. (2018). A systematic review of factors that influence youths career choices—the role of culture. *Frontiers in Education*, 3(58).  
<https://doi.org/10.46745/ilma.jbs.2019.15.01.03>
- Ambrose, D. (2003). Barriers to aspiration development and self-fulfillment: interdisciplinary insights for talent discovery. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 47, 282-294. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001698620304700405>
- Ashby, J. S., & Schoon, I. (2012). Living the dream? A qualitative retrospective study exploring the role of adolescent aspirations across the life span. *Developmental Psychology*, 48(6), 1694-1706. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027297>
- Aujla, I., & Farrer, R. (2015). The role of psychological factors in the career of the independent dancer. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6.  
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01688>
- Aytekin, I., Erdogmus, N., Erdil, O., & Akgün, A. E. (2016). Academicians' career capital and career satisfaction: The mediation effect of research productivity. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 16(6), 1921-1945.  
<https://doi.org/10.12738/estp.2016.6.0412>
- Baker, S. E., Edwards, R., & Doidge, M. (2012). *How many qualitative interviews is enough?: expert voices and early career reflections on sampling and cases in qualitative research*. National Centre for Research Methods, Southampton.
- Bang, H., & Ross, S.D. (2009). Volunteer motivation and satisfaction.
- Bohon, S. A., Johnson, M. K., & Gorman, B. K. (2006). College aspirations and expectations among latino adolescents in the United States, *Social Problems*, 53(2), 207–225. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2006.53.2.207>
- Bowen, M. (1978). *Family therapy in clinical practice*. Jason Aronson.
- Bradshaw, E. L., Sahdra, B. K., Ciarrochi, J., Parker, P. D., Martos, T., & Ryan, R. M. (2021). A configural approach to aspirations: The social breadth of aspiration profiles predicts well-being over and above the intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations that comprise the profiles. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 120(1), 226-256. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000374>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2). pp. 77-101.  
<https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brown, B. (2013). *Daring greatly: how the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead*. Gotham Books.

- Cooper, C. K. (2001). *Choosing self-fulfillment: A heuristic inquiry*. (Publication No.9997331). [Doctoral dissertation, The Union Institute Graduate College]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Calatrava, M., Martins, M. V., Schweer-Collins, M., Duch-Ceballos, C., & Rodríguez-González, M. (2022). Differentiation of self: A scoping review of Bowen Family Systems Theory's core construct. *Clinical Psychology Review, 91*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2021.102101>
- Cannizzo, F. (2017). 'You've got to love what you do': Academic labor in a culture of authenticity. *The Sociological Review 66*(1), 91-106.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026116681439>
- Dubreuil, P., & Forest, J. (2017). Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life. In E. K. Kelloway, K. Nielsen, & J. K. Dimoff (Eds.), *Leading to occupational health and safety: How leadership behaviours impact organizational safety and well-being* (281-303). John Wiley & Sons.
- Duffy, R. D., Allan, B. A., Autin, K. L., & Bott, E. M. (2013a). Calling and life satisfaction: It's not about having it, it's about living it. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 60*(1), 42-52. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030635>
- Duffy, R. D., & Autin, K. L. (2013b). Disentangling the link between perceiving a calling and living a calling. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 60*(2), 219-227.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031934>
- Edwards, M., & Ashkanasy, N. M. (2018). Emotions and failure in academic life: Normalizing the experience and building resilience. *Journal of Management and Organization, 24*(2), 167-188. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2018.20>
- Elliott-Moskwa, E. (2022). *The Growth Mindset Workbook: CBT Skills to Help You Build Resilience, Increase Confidence, and Thrive Through Life's Challenges*. New Harbinger Publications.
- Froman, L. (2010). Positive psychology in the workplace. *J Adult Dev, 17*, 59-69.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10804-009-9080-0>
- Gagné, M., & Deci, E. L. (2005). Self-determination theory and work motivation. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 26*, 331-362.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/job.322>
- Gewirth, A. (1998). *Self-fulfillment*. Princeton University Press.
- Gottfredson, L. S. (1981). Circumscription and compromise: A developmental theory of occupational goals. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 28*, (6), 545-580.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.28.6.545>
- Hansen, L. S. (1976). Career development education: Humanizing focus for educators. *Journal of Career Development, 3*, (1), 42-48.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/089484537600300107>

- Holland, J. L. (1997). *Making vocational choices: A theory of vocational personalities and work environments* (3rd ed.). Psychological Assessment Resources.
- Janus, E., & Misiorek, A. (2019). Why do people help each other? Motivations of volunteers who assisted persons with disabilities during world youth day. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 58(3), 1003-1010. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-018-0625-z>
- Kostere, K., Roberts, R., & Rich, J. (2016). *Succeeding as an entertainer: The experiences and descriptions of the process of reasoning used in shaping career aspirations for the successful entertainer – A ground theory study*. (Publication No.10066102). [Doctoral dissertation, Capella University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Middleton, J. J. (2017). *The mediating influence of career aspirations and career decision-making self-efficacy on self-differentiation, vocational identity and career indecision*. (Publication No.10612794). [Doctoral dissertation, Louisiana Tech University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.
- Muntanyola-Saura, D. y Belli, S. (2014). Emociones y música en movimiento. Discursos cruzados en una compañía de danza. *Trans 18*, 1-27.
- Pausch, R., & Zaslow, J. (2008). *The last lecture*. Hachet Books.
- Ranieri, V., Barratt, H., Fulop, N., & Rees, G. (2016). Factors that influence career progression among postdoctoral clinical academics: a scoping review of the literature. *BMJ Open*, 6(10). <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2016-013523>
- Reeve, J. (2018). *Understanding motivation and emotion* (7th ed.). Wiley.
- Roe, A. (1957). Early determinants of vocational choice. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 4(3), 212-217. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0045950>
- Robles, M., M (2012). Executive perceptions of the top 10 soft skills needed in today's workplace. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 75(4), 453–465. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1080569912460400>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 61. Article 101860. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860>
- Shamim, A. & Muazzam, A. (2020). Positive emotions scale; Construct development and validation. *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research*, 35(3), 429-454. <https://doi.org/10.33824/PJPR.2020.35.3.23>
- Shye, S. (2010). The motivation to volunteer: A systemic quality of life theory. *Soc Indic Res*, 98, 183-200. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-009-9545-3>

Skowron, E. A., & Friendlander, M. L. (1998). The differentiation of self-inventory: Development and initial validation. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 45(3), 235-246. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.45.3.235>

Super, D. E. (1957). *The psychology of careers*. Harper.

## 7. Appendix

### 7.1. Appendix A – Semi-structured interview script

#### *Introductory question*

How many years have you been in academia/been dancing/been volunteering?

#### *Objective 1: The decision process*

- When did your aspirations to go into academia/dance/volunteer begin? If it was not until your adulthood, was there any experience in your childhood/youth that influenced you in any way?
- Tell me in as much detail as possible about the reasoning and decision process that was involved in striving to be a researcher/dancer/volunteer.
- What and/or who influenced you the most to pursue a career in academia/dancing/volunteering?
- When you first embarked on your pursuit of this career/volunteer work, describe your initial career aspirations? Do you feel like you have accomplished them and how have they changed throughout the years?
- Did you ever weigh out any other options of careers/volunteer work? Why did you choose what you are doing instead?

#### *Objective 2: Barriers, obstacles, and limitations experienced*

- Can you describe the challenges you face in your career/volunteer experience?
- Have you ever wanted to quit, and abandon your career/volunteer aspirations? Why did you keep going?
- What was your social support like through the process? How has it changed/evolved?
- What was your socio-economic status like growing up? Explain how it supported you in getting to where you are or how it was a limitation?
- For when you started your career/volunteer work up to now, can you describe a difficult moment that strongly impacted you?

#### *Objective 3: Motivation and emotions*

- What motivates you to do what you do in academia/dance/volunteer? Is it different from before? If so, please elaborate.
- What feelings have you been able to experience as you have fulfilled what you aspire?
- Tell me more about the positive emotions and negative emotions you have experienced? Could doing anything else make you as happy? Please explain.
- What influences outside of yourself support and encourage you to continue pursuing what you enjoy?
- How has your life changed as you pursue what you aspire?

#### *Objective 4: Personal qualities and attributes*

- What qualities would you identify that have helped you get to this point?
- How did you overcome challenges you have faced?
- What advice would you give to someone to help them fulfill their aspirations?
- I am sure you know many who continue the pursuit year after year and get nowhere and possibly quit. Why is this, in your opinion? What decisions are they making poorly that results in this failure? What are they lacking?
- What successful daily habits do you do that contribute to where you are?

***Final question***

Is there anything else you would like to add to conclude?

## 7.2. Appendix B – Quotes included in the participants Thank-you cards

A form of gratitude and appreciation to all participants in this study for their valuable contribution and for inspiring the researcher to continue her own pursuit to fulfill her aspirations.

“Be persistent, tenacious, responsible... never exceeded the ethical limits and that also includes not changing to adapt in a mechanical way to the academic world because that probably makes the person disappear as a future professor.” – Academic.M1

“Be open because life is giving you opportunities and do not close yourself to an idea, stay open, let life give you things and try them because really when you do something and you do it well and you do it to the end, you end up enjoying it, even if it is not exactly what you thought it would be.” – Academic.F1

“Trust yourself and be happy because in the end if you are not happy during the process, it is not worth it.” – Academic.M3

“Work has its rewards. If you invest, you win!” – Dancer.F1

“Simply that you start without fear... That's what's going to get you closer to your goals a lot faster. Not being afraid to screw up, not being afraid to do it wrong, because without that, you're not going to learn.” – Dancer.M2

“First find the reason why you want it, second make the decision to do it, third the action, do it! And depending on what it is, know that there are sacrifices and if really your why is very big, the sacrifices will be accepted easier than if not. Because if not, once there is a sacrifice or something, things get difficult, and it is very easy to give up.” – Dancer.M3

“The fundamental principle is love... the love that you can give to another, the love that the other can give to you and in the end that is the basis of all people.” – Volunteer.F1

“You value more the things you have.” – Volunteer.F2

“If you invest a lot and you don't like what you do, it's not worth it. If you invest a lot and you don't like what you do, it is not something positive and favorable. So, it is important to dedicate time, you must like what you do, you must like what you do, and you must like the people you do it with.” – Volunteer.M3