What? Do I look like this?

A qualitative study of mirrors’ impact on contemporary dance pedagogy students’ experiences of themselves

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ABSTRACT

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What? Do I look like this? – a qualitative study of mirrors’ impact on contemporary dance pedagogy students’ experiences of themselves

The purpose of this study was to describe how mirrors affect contemporary dance pedagogy students’ experiences of themselves. Empirical material was collected through semi-structured interviews with four dance pedagogy students at the School of Dance and Circus, and analyzed with the help of post-humanistic perspective and Lacanian mirror stage theory. The results suggest that mirrors are active agents that participate in several things, for example they create an evaluating gaze, objectification, alienation from the subject as a unity, experience of two-dimensional bodies and distraction. The results also suggest that the mirrors actively create a front and direction, and therefore they shield dancers from sensing their ‘inner selves’ as well as others in the room, time and space. The feeling of success and mood affect the way dancers feel about their mirror images and themselves. In summary, this study stresses that the mirror, an object, is active and agentic, instead of thinking that the dancer is the only active part in the dancer-mirror relationship.

Keywords: dance, mirror, reflection, contemporary dance, the self, dance pedagogy, qualitative interviews, post-humanistic perspective, the Lacanian mirror stage
Table of contents

1 Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 2
  1.1 My personal relationship with mirrors .............................................................................. 2

2 Background .......................................................................................................................... 3
  2.1 Mirrors’ history and purpose in dance .................................................................................. 3
  2.2 The mirror and the self ......................................................................................................... 4

3 Research overview ............................................................................................................... 5
  3.1 Mirror, visual and kinesthetic senses .................................................................................... 5
  3.2 Mirror, body image and identity .......................................................................................... 7
  3.3 Mirror, concentration and learning ..................................................................................... 9
  3.4 Positive aspects of mirrors .................................................................................................. 10
  3.5 Conclusion of research overview ......................................................................................... 10

4 Theoretical perspectives .................................................................................................... 10
  4.1 Post-humanistic perspective .............................................................................................. 11
  4.2 The Lacanian mirror stage ................................................................................................ 12
  4.3 Summary of theoretical perspectives .................................................................................. 13

5 Purpose of the research and research questions ............................................................... 13

6 Research methodology ...................................................................................................... 13
  6.1 Choice of methods ............................................................................................................. 14
    6.1.1 Interviews ................................................................................................................... 14
  6.2 Selection and definition ...................................................................................................... 15
  6.3 Execution .......................................................................................................................... 16
  6.4 How data was being processed and analyzed ................................................................. 17
  6.5 Validity .............................................................................................................................. 17
  6.6 Ethical issues .................................................................................................................... 18

7 Analysis of the results ......................................................................................................... 19
  7.1 Mirrors and the object-subject division ............................................................................. 20
    7.1.1 A division between the object and the subject ............................................................... 20
    7.1.2 Mirrors and sensitivity ................................................................................................. 22
    7.1.3 Summary ..................................................................................................................... 23
  7.2 Mirrors and evaluative gaze .............................................................................................. 23
  7.3 Mirrors and the outside world .......................................................................................... 25
  7.4 Mirrors and two-dimensional experiences ....................................................................... 26
  7.5 Summary of the results .................................................................................................... 27

8 Discussion ........................................................................................................................... 28
  8.1 How do students of contemporary dance pedagogy relate to their own mirror images? .... 28
  8.2 How do contemporary dance pedagogy students’ experiences of themselves and their dancing differ in mirrored and non-mirrored conditions? ............................................ 30
  8.3 Evaluation of methods ....................................................................................................... 31
  8.4 Pedagogical perspective and suggestions for future research .......................................... 32
  8.5 Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 32

9 List of References ............................................................................................................... 34

Appendices ............................................................................................................................ 36
1 Introduction

The introductory section of the report will describe the background of my personal relationship with mirrors and introduce the area which will be studied.

1.1 My personal relationship with mirrors

Since I was born, I’ve been in contact with mirrors and especially when I started taking dance classes regularly at the age of three. I was always more or less affected by my own reflection, but it was during my early adolescence when I started to become more critical of my appearance.

At the age of 14, I got into Finnish National Ballet School (FNSB) and around that time I got my puberty and started to gain weight. I saw myself in the mirrors, compared myself to others and for the first time in my life I became conscious of my own appearance. I started to develop eating disorders and I was totally occupied by my own reflection from the mirrors. In dance classes I tried to choose a place where there was a thinning mirror in front of me or a place where I couldn’t see myself. It was hard, because there were always two walls fully covered with mirrors. I used the mirrors to look at my body and its ‘flaws’ instead of looking at my technique, forms and lines.

After my graduation from FNBS in 2011, I wanted to quit dancing. Forever. The mirrors messed up my head so badly that I was avoiding them, avoiding to face my own reflection. My reflection became my worst enemy. But something changed in 2015 when I got into the School of Dance and Circus (DOCH) in Stockholm, Sweden. When I started to study at this school, I was surprised by how comfortable my classmates seemed to be with their own bodies and the fact that all of the mirrors in modern dance classes were covered with curtains. At first, it made me feel uncomfortable. I wanted to see myself dancing on a big reflecting wall. The mirror had been such a huge part of my dance training that it felt almost meaningless when I didn’t see my own reflection during classes. For a very long time, the motivation for the movement had come from outside, by me watching myself move in a two-dimensional wall.

After a while of being confused about the mirrorless environment, I started to enjoy dancing again. I couldn’t look at myself from mirrors during most classes and that made me motivated
to try and feel the movement coming from inside. I started to question the usefulness of the mirrors in other classes too and started to use the mirrors to look at other things than just the ‘flaws’ in my body. I was relieved. I had somehow broken the unhealthy relationship which I had with mirrors.

As you may see, I’ve personally had a very complicated relationship with mirrors and my own reflection through most of my life. For a long time my identity was dependent on the mirror image of myself, seen on the two-dimensional reflecting wall. As a future dance pedagogue, I think that it’s important that I know what I’m going to do with mirrors in dance studios. It’s problematic that there are so many dance teachers and pedagogues who use mirrors in their classes with no knowledge of what kind of impact mirrors may have on their students. My personal battle with my reflection is the main motivator that drove me to accomplish this research.

2 Background

The background section of this report will shortly describe the history and purpose of mirrors in dance context. Finally, the discussion on the difference between mirror image and ‘the self’ is also introduced.

2.1 Mirrors’ history and purpose in dance

Throughout the early phases of my career, the mirror was my nemesis, seductive to the point of addiction … As a primary teaching tool for dance, the mirror fosters the delusion that beauty is only skin-deep, that truth is found only in the plasticity of movement.

(Kirkland 1986, p. 73)

Dance studios typically feature a wall of mirrors, but why? As seen on the quote above from Gelsey Kirkland’s (1986) autobiography Dancing on My Grave and my introduction of this research, mirrors may have a huge impact on a dancer. To get more understanding of why mirrors are nowadays present in almost every dance studio, I wanted to look more into the mirror’s history. According to Mark Pendergrast (2007), the author of the book Mirror Mirror: A History of the Human Love Affair With Reflection, the first “mirror” was undoubtedly just still water, but the first man-made mirror dates from around 6200 BCE. First mirrors were rare and costly, and they became symbols of something sacred and divine (Pendergrast 2007, pp. 2-4). The mirror’s history in dance is more unclear and I came into a conclusion that there’s very little documented history on mirrors in dance training, with no
definitive references to be found in literature. Dr. Shantel Ehrenberg (2010), Lecturer in Dance & Theatre at the University of Surrey, writes that the prevailing historical narrative is that the usage of mirrors began in the context of ballet training probably around 18th century when mirror technology was rapidly developing. Sally Radell (2013), Professor of Dance at the Emory Collage of Arts and Sciences, agrees with Ehrenberg and adds that mirrors were used for comparing one’s reflected image with the perceived ideal image of the performance of a given phrase or step. That can be applied to Mark Pendergrast’s (2007) statement that the mirror was first known as “the flattering face” and because it seemed to show how one looked from the outside, it has often been connected to the human experience of self-consciousness and the desire for self-improvement. Helena Wulff, Professor at the University of Stockholm, writes in Ballet Across Borders: Career and Culture in the World of Dancers that mirrors are normally located in a dance studio approximately where the audience would be seated during a performance (Wulff 2011, pp. 7-8). It gives dancers an opportunity to see themselves as the audience would see them. Radell (2013) mentions that in general mirrors tend to be used more often in codified and traditional forms of dance that place high value on line and positions, as in ballet. Mirror seems to be used less in contemporary dance forms or in improvisations that tend to focus on sensations of one’s body and how movement is affected by them (Radell 2013).

2.2 The mirror and the self

Is the reflection of myself the same as me? This question fascinates me in many ways and is discussed, for example, in Sabine Melchoir-Bonnet’s (2004) book Kuvastin: Peilin historiaa. Even though her book is not an academic publication, I thought that it would add some interesting aspects to this context. According to Melchoir-Bonnet, the person standing in front of the mirror, and the reflection seen in the mirror, can’t be perceived as similar or placed on top of each other because mirror converts the right hand to be the left hand, and so on. The mirror reflection of our bodies is not a recurrence of the anatomical reality, nor the product of a social reality. Instead, the mirror functions as a reflector of otherness (ibid. pp. 234-258). Melchoir-Bonnet draws a conclusion: “we see and know the face of others’ better than we know the face of ourselves” (Melchoir-Bonnet 2004, p. 259). By that Melchoir-Bonnet means that the mirror does not represent the “real self”.

It also seems relevant for me to shortly present how I use the concept of ‘the self’ in this thesis, because it’s rather frequently used. Here I do not lean on certain specific theories but
use it in a more everyday sense, as something happening mentally inside an individual - as a sense of individual’s existence, consciousness, thoughts, senses and feelings.

3 Research overview

This section of the report will introduce nine relevant articles and studies that have been accomplished on the presence of mirrors in dance context. The articles were found by using terms ‘mirror’ and ‘dance’ in different databases, for example EBSCO and Taylor & Francis Group. This research overview is divided into four topics: 1. Mirror, visual and kinesthetic senses, 2. Mirror, body image and identity, 3. Mirror, concentration and learning and 4. Positive aspects of mirrors. The conclusion of this overview can be found at the end of this section.

3.1 Mirror, visual and kinesthetic senses

In the following section, I will introduce five research articles that discuss how dancers’ visual and kinesthetic senses are affected by the mirror.

Many people who work with, and research dance, emphasize the importance of developing kinesthetic awareness, a conscious feeling of motion and the positions of the body. This kinesthetic awareness is often seen as an opposite to just relying on the mirror when correcting lines of the body. For example, in a study entitled ‘My Body and Its Reflection: A Case Study of Eight Dance Students and the Mirror in the Ballet Classroom’ (2014) Sally Radell, Margaret Keneman, Lecturer at the University of Tennessee, Daniel Adame, former Professor at the Emory University and Steven Cole, Professor at the Emory University, write about this instinctive kinesthetic awareness of knowing exactly where one’s body is and what it is doing. They mention that it is a critical ingredient in becoming a technically skilled, aware and expressive dancer. If dancer pays too much attention to her own reflection, self-consciousness may over-power dancers’ own internalized sense of her own body, and in that way the mirror becomes a ‘crutch’ which prevents dancers from fully developing their kinesthetic sensibilities. The researchers conclude that dancers develop their own individual relationships with mirrors, but many students will disassociate their somatic experiences of themselves from the reflection they see in the mirror. As a result, the students view themselves as objects rather than kinesthetic human beings (Radell, Keneman, Adame & Cole 2014, pp. 161-178).
The mirror image presents to the dancer one type of visual representation of his/her kinesthetically felt movement which at times aids self-correction and performance accuracy. On the other side, however, are various negative connotations with the mirror, particularly the occasional failure of correction via an external image, negative effects on performance quality, critical appraisal and comparison with an unattainable ideal.

(Ehrenberg 2010, p. 182)

The same phenomena, which are explained in the quote above, are discussed in ‘Reflections on Reflections: Mirror Use in a University Dance Training Environment’ where Shantel Ehrenberg (2010) explores aspects of the dancer-mirror relationship and examines the ways the mirror may affect dancers’ experiences. She describes the dancer-mirror relationship as a back and forth process between subject and object and decides to call this cyclical action-reaction pattern the dancer-mirror feedback loop. When Ehrenberg discussed this phenomenon with the dancers in her study, several dancers described that it was easy to self-correct initially by using the mirror, but then they had difficulties retaining that correction kinesthetically, when the mirrors were not there anymore. Ehrenberg suggests that visual mirror distractions take away from developing a certain quality needed in performance. Mirror gives an inaccurate reflection that does not represent the three-dimensional person. Several of her interviews with the dancers supported this claim (Ehrenberg 2010, pp. 172-184).

Julie Brodie, Professor of Dance at the Kenyon College and Elin Elizabeth Lobel, Professor of Kinesiology at the Towson University, discuss the importance of vision in dance in a study entitled ‘More than just a Mirror Image: The Visual System and Other Modes of Learning and Performing Dance’ (2008). They write that traditionally in dance, visual information has been used in two primary ways: 1. Error detection and correction based on two-dimensional visual information obtained from a mirror and 2. Learning movement by modeling the teacher. Brodie and Lobel suggest that dance students in a mirrored context may not perceive the movement accurately and they may choose to focus on less important aspects of the movement image being presented. They write about students who can’t take their eyes off the mirror and refer to that function as the eyes-glued-to-the-mirrors phenomena. In their research article, Brodie and Lobel come to conclusion that periodically turning away from or covering the mirror is a good idea, because then other sensory systems don’t need to compete with visual information for attention. They write: “Allowing the kinesthetic and ambient visual systems to operate optimally can free up the focal visual sense for other uses in performance” (Brodie & Lobel 2008, pp. 23-31).
Sally Radell (2013) discusses the same phenomenon in her article entitled ‘Mirrors in the Dance Class: Help or Hindrance?’ She writes that it’s problematic when a dancer pays too much attention to the image she sees of herself in the mirror. This self-consciousness may overpower dancer’s own internalized sense of her body as it moves through space. She claims that if dancers practice dancing in front of a mirror too much while training, without developing other sensory systems, they may see detriments to their skill development when they are then required to work without the mirror (Radell 2013).

In this next research article, ‘The Mirror and Ballet Training: Do You Know How Much the Mirror’s Presence Is Really Affecting You?’ (2016), Kathy Diehl, Assistant Professor of Dance at the Cleveland State University, is on the same track as the researchers above. In her study, she suggests that all dancers have unique relationships with mirrors, but she writes also about kinesthesia: “over reliance on visual cues may interfere with the ability to attend to kinesthetic cues” (Diehl 2006, p. 68). Diehl claims that when the mirror becomes one of the primary means of self-criticism, and the body is only seen from the front, the image becomes flat and superficial (ibid. pp. 67-70).

In conclusion, the mirror seems to have a negative impact on dancers’ kinesthetic sensations and it’s perceived as a disturbing object. The mirror craves a lot of attention from dancers’ visual senses and therefore makes it difficult for dancers to use other sensory systems. This may affect the development of a certain performance quality or the knowledge of how to kinesthetically self-correct. Also, the dancers may view themselves as objects instead of living, breathing human beings.

3.2 Mirror, body image and identity

This section of the research overview is going to present five studies that investigate mirror’s impact on dancers’ experiences of themselves and their body image.

The concept of objectification is discussed by Aimie Purser, Lecturer at the University of Nottingham, in her research article entitled ‘The dancing body-subject: Merleau-Ponty’s mirror stage in the dance studio’ (2011). In this study, Purser researches concepts of body-subjectivity and intersubjective mirroring by interviewing professional contemporary dancers. She uses phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy to understand these conversations. In her study, Purser highlights that the dancers in her study problematized
mirrors, but also made use of them. She mentions that “the external image can produce the problems of objectification and alienation” (ibid. p. 200) and “the positional image as seen in the mirror does not fully capture what it is to be a moving, dancing body-subject” (ibid. p. 201). Purser concludes that intersubjective mirroring (learning by imitating teacher or others) may be a better way to learn than using actual mirrors in dance classes:

Here it was seen that intersubjective mirroring had the potential to contribute to the refinement of the dancer’s corporeal schema in the same way that mirror images can but, because of the potential for mutual subjective recognition and communication, the objectifying effects were potentially removed and dancers tended to report these experiences in positive terms without reference to separation or alienation.

(Purser 2011, p. 200)

Professors at the Muhlenberg College, Karen Dearborn, Kathleen Harring and Christina Young, and Assistant Director of Development at the Independence Seaport Museum, Emily O’Rourke, write in their research article ‘Mirror and Phrase Difficulty Influence Dancer Attention and Body Satisfaction’: “Dancers and dance teachers have likely experienced this duality of the ‘separation of the doer from the doing’ and would readily cite the mirror as a tool for inducing this dually self-aware state. Mirrors invite one to see the self from the outside, to imagine how others perceive this self, and to compare self to the reference group” (Dearborn et al. 2006, p. 116). They add that mirrors function as invitation to daydreams and disembodiment and mirrors also facilitate seeing the work of others and invite comparison of self to others (Dearborn et al. 2006, pp. 116-123). Radell et al. (2014) continue in the same track by stating that this self-awareness leads one to see one’s body as an object. Dancers, and people in general, often compare this ‘object’ to an ideal image present in the environment and if the body doesn’t match the ideal, this may develop a negative self-evaluation. They explain that it is an important aspect to discuss because the mirror seems to be a tool commonly used in dance training, even though the image presented in mirrors is not same with real life three-dimensionality. The results of the study suggest that the students taught with mirrors may develop possibly unhealthy body image (Radell et al. 2014, pp. 161-178).

In ‘Body Image and Mirror Use in Ballet Class’ (2012) Sally Radell concludes that mirror reflections of self, teacher, and other students affects students’ body image and it appears that the effect of mirrors on dancers’ body image may be dependent on varying factors, for ex. skill level, level of material taught etc. (Radell 2012, p. 10). When Radell, Adame and Cole (2004) researched mirrors impact on dance students’ body images in their research article
entitled ‘The Impact of Mirrors on Body Image and Classroom Performance in Female College Ballet Dancers’, they saw a trend that students taught without mirrors had increased body-image satisfaction scores (Radell, Adame & Cole 2004, pp. 47-52). The researchers add: “a dancer’s personal vision of their body image is an important component of her psychological health and wellbeing and can help or hinder their performance in the classroom” (ibid. p. 47).

In conclusion, the mirror seems to have a negative impact on dancers’ body images and their experiences of themselves. Mirrors invite dancers to compare themselves to others which can lead to negative self-evaluation and possibly unhealthy body-image. Purser (2011) suggested that intersubjective mirroring may be a better way to learn than actual mirroring, because mirrors may have an objectifying and alienating effect.

3.3 Mirror, concentration and learning
This section introduces two studies where mirrors’ impact on dancers’ concentration and learning ability were investigated.

Dearborn et al. (2006) examined 64 college dancers’ level of attention. They did this by using a 2 X 2 research design, where students got to learn and perform both an easy and a complex dance phrase in mirrored and non-mirrored environments. The results of this study suggest that students with mirrored environment found it most difficult to pay attention when learning and performing a simple phrase. Students without mirror did not really differ in their ability to pay attention in either the simple or complex phrase conditions (Dearborn et al. 2006, pp. 116-123).

The results of Radell’s, Adame’s and Cole’s (2004) research article support these findings. Their study investigated the effect of teaching with mirrors on the component of body image and dance performance of female college ballet dancers. 30 dancers were taught for 14 weeks, 15 of them with mirrors and 15 without mirrors. The researchers did a measurement in students’ skill level during the first and last week of these 14 weeks. The results of this study suggest that the use of mirror in a beginning ballet classroom may negatively affect the skill acquisition of the dancer. The students who were taught without mirrors got significantly higher scores regarding to classroom performance and the conclusion was that the use of a mirror was distracting (Radell, Adame & Cole 2004, pp. 47-52).
In conclusion, mirrors seem to have a negative impact on dancers’ concentration and learning ability. Mirrored environment invites dancers to concentrate on other things than training and thereby mirrors may negatively affect dancers’ skill acquisition.

3.4 **Positive aspects of mirrors**

There’s also positive aspects of mirrors to be found in these studies. For example, Sally Radell writes in her resource paper ‘Mirrors in the Dance Class: Help or Hindrance?’ (2013) that mirrors provide immediate visual feedback and allow dancers to evaluate the height and shape of their movement, to correct their placement, and to assess the line of their bodies. Mirrors are also helpful as instructional tools: they give the opportunity for teachers to situate themselves so that they can view many students at one time (Radell 2013). Ehrenberg (2010, p. 174) mentions that mirrors are said to be useful from a motor control and learning perspective, for basic body alignment, for relationships between body parts and correct or incorrect positions.

3.5 **Conclusion of research overview**

It is evident that the research articles introduced above present a wide area of mirrors’ possible effects in dance education and it seems clear that mirrors can affect many areas of a dancer’s life: concentration, learning, body image (and identity), confidence, kinesthetic and overall spatial awareness, performance skills, artistic expression and mind-body connection. Mirrors may also lead to objectification and alienation. All these aspects go hand in hand, affecting and being affected by one another, with one common denominator - the mirror. In conclusion, there seem to be both positive and negative aspects to the dancer’s reflected self-image and the experiences with mirror are complicated and multi-faceted.

4 **Theoretical perspectives**

In this section, the theoretical perspectives of this research will be presented, as well as the different terms that will be used in the report. I chose to take inspiration from two different perspectives to make me able to analyze the results of my study. Several perspectives were needed, because it was important to gain comprehension on mirrors as active agents, but also on their effects on subject-object relationship.
4.1 Post-humanistic perspective

In this report, I take inspiration from post-humanistic perspective, how it’s presented by Karin Hultman, Lecturer at the University of Stockholm, in her article about materiality and subjectification (Hultman 2011). In her article, Hultman describes how non-human subjects participate in the construction of our intentions and identities. Human beings are constantly involved in important relations with other humans, but also with non-living components: toys, technology, furniture, mirrors etc. Post-humanistic perspective investigates relations between humans and material and it suggests that border between them is fluid. The word *post* problematizes *humanistic perspective* which proposes that humans are unambiguously separated from the rest of the world. Instead, the post-humanistic perspective suggests that humans have always been hybrids, always affecting and affected by the world around us. The subject is not separated from its surroundings, but instead it’s constantly in relation to them. Post-humanistic perspective emphasizes materiality and enables us to understand that humans are in constant interaction with it. Hultman also states that people tend to focus mainly on the *social* relations, and it makes them blind to see how much *the non-humane materiality* is also creating and constructing these relations, realities, bodies and subjectivities. The problem is that social relations and discourses are often seen as active forces forming the reality, and material is often seen as something passive (Hultman 2011, pp. 160-170).

One important aspect in post-humanistic perspective is that not just humans, but also nonhumans, have agents that can make things happen, change and make an influence. This suggestion breaks the traditional division between active subjects and passive objects. The things that we understand as passive objects, maybe a pencil or a piece of paper, are understood now as participants, active agents with potential to influence. Things, exactly like people, can make things happen, perform actions, produce effects and alter situations. The post-humanistic perspective suggests that also nonliving materials have intentions and can distribute to the network. Instead of thinking that materials are passive, we can think that materials work as forces, and as humans and discourses, they can make a huge impact on the ongoing construction of the world (Hultman 2011, pp. 160-170).

In this report, the material in focus is the mirror. Post-humanistic perspective is used to gain knowledge of how the mirror (object) affects dancer (subject), and how mirror contributes in the construction of dancer’s experience of ‘the self’.
4.2 The Lacanian mirror stage

In my study, I take inspiration from Jacques Lacan’s (1901-1981) theory of ‘the mirror stage’ with the help of interpretations by three researchers. I explain this theory through these interpretative texts, since the original texts are rather complicated to understand. As I understand, Jacques Lacan (2006, pp. 75-81), a French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, was interested in an event that occurs in the life of every child somewhere between the age of six and eighteen months: the first time that they recognize themselves in a mirror. They have the strange experience of looking at their own reflection and thinking: ‘that is me!’.

Aimie Purser (2011) writes:

This process is problematic for Lacan as the reflection (prototypically for Lacan the image seen in a mirror) is an external form, and identification of such an external form as ‘I’ or ego means that the foundation of the child’s identity or sense of self is characterized by a separation, splitting or ‘alienation’.

(Purser 2011, p. 188)

Purser continues by explaining that mirroring is always objectifying - mirror functions as “an external object which reduces the body to an image or object” (Purser 2011, p. 189). I interpret it like this: The subject is my consciousness (senses and thoughts), and the mirror - an object, through its reflection creates an object of me, of my body. Yet, the experience of an object on the flat, reflecting wall is still subjective. The objectification happens when I look at myself through an object and I, in all my subjectivity, experience myself as an object. Crucially, this moment can feel very unsettling, because the body seen in the mirror doesn’t necessarily look as we feel. The image in the mirror is, by necessity, far more one-dimensional than the entity that beholds it. Ulla Kerren (2012) writes in her Master’s Thesis entitled “‘I Really Am a Stranger to Myself’: A Lacanian Reading of Identity in John Banville’s Eclipse’ that “the most important function of the mirror stage is the development of a unified body image” (ibid. pp. 7-8). She mentions also that alienation to this mirror image is involved, because “the identification with the image is an identification with the other” (Kerren 2012, p. 8).

Marjaana Kella, Professor at the Aalto University in Helsinki, writes about Lacan’s mirror stage in her doctoral dissertation Käännöksiä: Maisema, kasvot ja esittäminen valokuvassa (2014). She explains that the mirror stage is not just a transitory moment, but instead it is something that lasts throughout our lives (Kella 2014, p. 199). Both Purser and Kella highlight the importance of the gaze in this event of objectification (Kella 2014, p. 200-201;
Purser 2011, p. 189). The gaze is crucial, a requirement for us to experience ourselves as objects in the mirror. Kella explains that when we see ourselves in the mirrors, it splits us into external and internal experiences of ourselves (Kella 2014, p. 198). This leads us to experience ourselves both as subjects and objects at the same time.

Lacan’s theory can help me to understand the differences in how the students experience themselves differently in mirrored and non-mirrored conditions. It also creates discussion about subject and object, and their complicated relationship.

4.3 Summary of theoretical perspectives

In conclusion, post-humanistic perspective focuses on the relationship between object and subject and it requests that different objects have agency, and can make things happen. In this study, post-humanistic perspective is used to gain understanding of how mirrors (objects) as active agents affect dancers (subjects). Finally, the Lacanian mirror stage theory explains how we as humans create ourselves and our identity by gazing reflections of us in the mirrors. With mirrors, our existence becomes divided in two, both a subject and an object. In this study, I take inspiration from this perspective to gain understanding of how, and why, dancers experience themselves differently in mirrored and non-mirrored conditions.

5 Purpose of the research and research questions

The purpose of the degree project is to find out how mirrors impact on contemporary dance pedagogy students’ experiences of themselves.

Sub-questions with the purpose of strengthening the research are:

1. How do students of contemporary dance pedagogy relate to their own mirror images?

2. How do contemporary dance pedagogy students’ experiences of themselves and their dancing differ in mirrored and non-mirrored conditions?

6 Research methodology

The process of the research - including choice of methods, execution, validity and ethical aspects - will be described in the following part of the report. The purpose is to provide an overview of how the data has been collected.
6.1 Choice of methods

In this section, the choice of methods will be introduced. The method is presented in a way how it is used to gather data in this report.

Choice of methods may have huge consequences on the results of a study. Methods form the results together with the purpose and theoretical perspectives of a research. As Annika Eliasson writes in her book *Kvantitativ metod från början* (2013), the choices of methods are often tied together with theoretical perspectives - some theories work better together with qualitative methods and some with quantitative methods. She explains that qualitative methods are more flexible than quantitative methods - it’s possible to adjust them depending on the situation. Qualitative methods are also good for research of a phenomena that can be difficult or impossible to quantify. She mentions that the most common qualitative methods are observations and interviews (Eliasson 2013, pp. 21-27). Because of the purpose, as well as the theoretical perspectives of this study, I decided to use a qualitative method - more specifically interviewing. To me, it seems that the phenomena I discuss in this report requires a deeper understanding of how dancers see themselves through mirrors and that these interpretations cannot be quantified, nor observed.

6.1.1 Interviews

Ulla Eriksson-Zetterquist and Göran Ahrne (2015) write in *Handbok i kvalitativa metoder* that the advantage with qualitative interviews is that the questions, and the order of them, can be adjusted during the interview (Eriksson-Zetterquist & Ahrne 2015, p. 38). Eliasson adds that interviews can be more or less structured, depending on how the interviewer decides to arrange them (Eliasson 2013, p. 22). In this study, I have decided to use individual semi-structured interviews. According to Sandy Qu and John Dumay (2011) the semi-structured interview is the most common of all qualitative research methods, and it stands between structured and unstructured interviews. Semi-structured interview involves prepared questioning guided by identified themes. Qu and Dumay add that it is commonly used because it’s flexible, accessible and intelligible, and capable of disclosing important and often hidden facets of human and organizational behavior. Most importantly, it enables interviewees to provide responses in their own terms (Qu & Dumay 2011, pp. 243-247). I chose this specific interview method, mainly because I wanted to have prepared questions so that I would not get lost during the interviews, but also to make space for the interviewees to share deeper reflections through additional questions. As Annika Lantz (2013) writes in her
book *Intervjumetodik*, semi-structured interviews have questions that are usually concrete, but also open-ended (Lantz 2013, pp. 73-74). This leaves place for the interviewee to express his/her opinions and reflections quite freely.

### 6.2 Selection and definition

In this part of the methodology section, the participants and the way they were selected will be explained. This section provides an understanding of why certain students were selected to participate in this study over others.

I executed interviews with four third-year dance pedagogy students at the School of Dance and Circus (DOCH), which is part of Stockholm University of the Arts in Sweden. I chose to perform four interviews because of the timeframe of this degree project, and because it seemed that these students could provide an adequate amount of data to analyze. Third year students were chosen because I assumed that at this stage of education they would have more experience in dancing in front of mirrors than for example the first-year students. All these students have contemporary dance as their main subject, but they have different optional subjects and backgrounds in dance. I decided to focus on contemporary dancers, because as seen on the research overview of this thesis, more formal genres of dance have already been studied. The same reason is behind the choice to focus on students who study dance pedagogy.

After I had resolved which kind of dispersion of students I wanted to have, I started to ask students to participate in this study. I used convenience sampling as a method to gather informants who I already had contact with and knew would be suitable for this study. Because this is a qualitative research, I thought that it wouldn’t be reasonable to do a random selection of participants. Instead, I decided to select participants that, in my opinion, could give variety to this study. All the students that I chose seemed to approach things differently, some of them had more philosophical points of view, some others more down-to-earth aspects. I was interested to see which kinds of thoughts these different personalities could provide to this research. I also decided to interview both female and male students to get a wider spectrum of different reflections - one of them is male, three of them females, and they are between 24 and 27 of age. All of them have different backgrounds and different amounts of experience in dance.
6.3 Execution

This part of the text will explain how the interviews of this study were executed.

Before I started to process this research, I created an interview template which I had divided in three categories: dancer/mirror, mirror / the others and overall reflections of mirrors. I decided to shape several differently formed questions around the same subject in order to get deeper answers from the interviewees. The questions were generated considering the purpose, sub questions and theoretical perspectives of this study. All of the questions of the template can be seen on Appendix 2 (English) and Appendix 3 (Swedish).

After I had decided which students I wanted to interview, I contacted them in person and through Facebook. I described the purpose of this study and interview, and asked if they were interested to participate. All of them answered that they wanted to contribute in this thesis, which led us to decide the dates and times for interviews.

I executed a pilot interview before I started to interview the participants. The pilot interview made it easier for me to adjust the questions and the order of them. It also helped me to figure out what should be said before and after the interviews. The pilot interview was carried out as a phone conversation the day before the first interview, and the participant was a person with a background in dance. The interview went well, but I realized that I had a couple of similar, repetitive questions and I decided to leave them out. It also made me feel more confident to interview the participants.

All of the interviews were carried out in different rooms and studios at DOCH. This location was chosen because all of the participants, as well as the interviewer were in this building during every business day. Rooms or studios were always booked beforehand to ensure that there would not be any distractions or interruptions during the interviews.

All participants were asked the same questions and each one of them answered to all of the questions. Some of the discussions led to new questions. All interviews were executed in Swedish, because participants had Swedish as their mother tongue. The length of the interviews varied between 22 minutes and 40 minutes, and they were performed during weeks 12 and 13 in Spring 2018.
6.4 How data was being processed and analyzed

In this part of the methodology section, I will describe how the results from the interviews were being processed and analyzed.

Transcriptions of the interviews were completed on the same day as the interviews were executed, which made the transcriptions detailed and descriptive. I started the analyzing process by reading all of the interviews several times, while trying to find answers that were relevant for my research. I translated the relevant data from Swedish to English. I decided not to identify an individual profile, but instead, I wanted to search for experiences, thoughts and approaches that created patterns and demonstrated similarities and differences in the answers. Therefore, I divided the material that I wanted to use under several headlines with the help of thematising. The headlines were chosen regarding to my research question and sub-questions as well as the concepts that came up during the interviews. Different themes had different colors to make me able to keep track with the material that I had. After that, I divided these smaller categories under four main themes that I present in the results section: 1. Mirrors and the object-subject division, 2. Mirrors and evaluative gaze, 3. Mirrors and the outside world, 4. Mirrors and two-dimensional experiences. These themes were identified by searching for most common and frequent words and concepts, but also keeping in mind the research question and the sub-questions of this research. I organized the answers of the interviews with the help of common denominators and differences and tried to create an interesting storyline that would be easy to follow and discuss.

6.5 Validity

Validity is a central concept in research and it is clarified in this section. I try to explain the validity of this research with the help of Steinar Kvale’s article entitled ‘The Social Construction of Validity’ (1995). In this article, Steinar Kvale, a late professor of pedagogical psychology, writes that validity should “be discussed in the context of postmodern conceptions of knowledge” (ibid. p. 19). He states that in the modern social science, the concepts of reliability, generalization and validity have obtained the status of a scientific holy trinity. But yet, “in a postmodern perspective, there are multiple ways of knowing and multiple truths, and the concept of validity indicates a firm boundary line between truth and nontruth” (ibid. p. 21). According to Kvale, validity can be divided into narrow positivist approach and a broader, postmodern approach. In a broader approach, validity pertains to whether a method investigates what it is intended to investigate. Within this conception of
validity, as Kvale writes, qualitative research may lead to valid knowledge (Kvale 1995, pp. 18-30).

The following discussion of validity represents a rather moderate postmodernism […] it is not a ‘skeptical’, but an ‘affirmative’ postmodernism; while rejecting the notion of a universal truth, it accepts the possibility of specific local, personal, and community forms of truth, with a focus on daily life and local narrative.

(Kvale 1995, p. 21)

This research provides a truth of certain phenomenon just at one school, during one specific time, and it can’t be applied to other contexts undoubtedly. I think that because this research is executed in a micro community, it provides specific qualitative knowledge to the field. The four participants distributed their own reflections to this study, and I analyzed them through my own interpretations, and as Kvale puts it, “all the interpretations are not equal” (ibid. p. 30). I interpret the answers as transparently as I can, showing the ways of how and why I come to these conclusions. As Kvale writes, “man must prove the truth - that is, the reality and power of his thinking in practice” (ibid. p. 32). I do this by showing precisely how I used the methods and theoretical perspectives in this study, which makes the process of this research transparent. Because of this transparency, it’s possible to follow every step of the research process and this research becomes valid and trustworthy in its context.

6.6 Ethical issues

In this part of the methodology section the ethical procedures of this study will be described. According to the Swedish Research Council, research must aim to society’s and individuals’ evolvement. In addition, the protection of individuals’ integrity must be taken care of with four main areas of ethical principles: the demands of information, approval, confidentiality and usage (Vetenskapsrådet 2002, p. 5-14). I proceeded this research with the help of these four aspects provided by the Swedish Research Council and I will present the way I dealt with them below.

When I searched for the participants to this study, I informed them about their role, as well as the purpose of this research. After their interest, I sent them a document (Appendix 1 - information to participants), which explained the purpose of this study and the interviews (the principle of information). The same document presented five important aspects for the participants about their integrity, clarifying the principles of approval, confidentiality and usage: 1. Their participation is optional and they have the right to end the cooperation without
negative consequences 2. The source data collected during this project is not going to be used for other purposes than this specific research project, 3. The results of this study are going to be available at DOCH's library and DiVA portal, 4. Their privacy and the confidentiality of personal information is protected to minimize the impact of the study on their physical, mental and social integrity, and 5. Their statements are going to be published after their approval.

Before every interview, I ensured that the participant had read the document and reminded her/him about the purpose of the interview, as well as the ethical aspects. I also asked them if it was okay that the interview would be recorded, and that the recordings would be just for me to ease the transcription process. All of them approved it. The interviews were recorded with my mobile phone, and the recordings will be secured in it until this research is accomplished. I also promised that they would have the opportunity to read the material that I chose to use from the interviews. Therefore, the answers in the results section only include information which the interviewees have chosen to share. To ensure participants’ anonymity in this process, I’ve decided to refer to them with code names: P1, P2, P3 and P4. P stands for participant and the numbers present the order of the interviews. Due to the lack of male students at DOCH, I’ve also decided not to point out the gender of the participants, instead I refer to all of them as “s/he”, “student” or “participant”.

7 Analysis of the results

In the following part of the report, the results received from the interviews will be presented and analyzed with the help of theoretical perspectives. The results and analysis were chosen to be presented together, because it did not seem relevant in this thesis to separate the results from the analysis. That could have given an impression that there are results which are unaffected by the concepts and themes that I use, and the questions I have asked. Therefore, I set up the analysis of the results in conjunction with the results. The answers are divided under these four themes, yet there is a constant overlapping between them: 1. Mirrors and the object-subject division, 2. Mirrors and evaluative gaze, 3. Mirrors and the outside world, 4. Mirrors and two-dimensional experiences. The conclusion of the results can be found at the end of this section.
7.1 Mirrors and the object-subject division

With the help of the Lacanian mirror stage theory, I try to present a discussion about mirrors and the object-subject relationship. Later, I continue with a discussion of sensitivity.

7.1.1 A division between the object and the subject

Some of the interviewees in this study had reflections that can be interpreted in the context of Lacanian mirror stage theory. During the second interview, a conversation with participant P2, appeared a rendition of the mirror image as something that was not equivalent to the idea of her/himself:

P2: I think that I have a completely different feeling of myself inside myself than what I see in the mirrors. Sometimes when I’m at home and I look at myself in the mirror, I think: ‘What? Do I look like this?’ It’s really weird - I don’t think that my body feels the same way as it looks like. Sometimes it can be a different experience, like: ‘yes, this is how I look like’, but sometimes I feel more like: ‘does it look like this when I do this? It doesn’t feel like it.’

P2: I prefer to dance without mirrors because then I can feel more than see. The things that I see are not real, they are not the truth. What is real is the feeling I’ve got inside of me, and in my opinion, that is the most important thing.

My understanding is that student P2 has a conception of her/himself as something on the inside and when s/he sees the picture of her/his body presented by the mirrors, s/he can’t identify her/himself with it. The inner and outer experiences of her/himself do not match with each other. It seems clear that s/he puts more value on the inner self - the one that involves sensing and feeling, than on the outer self - the one that can be seen. It is perceptible that s/he feels that there is a clear distinction between the outer and inner self, which makes her/him able to feel that these parts of one’s subjectivity do not always match with one another.

Participant P4 took the discussion further - s/he talked about how people tend to objectify themselves:

P4: The relationship is quite complex because I tend to objectify myself. As soon as the mirror is there, there is an object - I see myself from the outside of myself. The mirror becomes a tool which I tend to be dependent on. I have an analyzing dialogue inside me; instead of doing the analysis from within, there is a gaze and the gaze is on myself externally.

P4: I create an object of myself - but also a subject, that works, thinks, feels and senses. And I know that others do it too. So that place is difficult; I’m confident in my work, but at the same time there is always an idea of objectification. Looking and valuing technique or aesthetics through dance.

Through mirrors, the subject becomes something visible - an object, something we can examine and value. The mirror, but also the gaze, play a huge part in creating the experience
of identity, as it can be understood with the help of the mirror stage theory by Lacan. The mirror is there and it throws back a picture of me, or something that I can assume to be me. But, in order to get to experience this picture, I need to see it. Our gaze offers the possibility for us to experience ourselves from the outside perspective, and participant P3 summarized it:

P3: When there is a mirror, I can see myself from the outside and when there isn’t a mirror, I can only see myself from my own point of view. So, when there’s a mirror, I think more about myself from the outside, and without mirrors I think more about myself from within.

As it can be understood, P3 pointed out that without mirrors, there is also an opportunity to see oneself, yet it’s not possible to see the whole body or face at the same time. We can only see ourselves from our own periphery. To continue the discussion about the subject and the object, P4 compared the possibility to see oneself in the mirrors to the possibility to watch oneself on film:

P4: Sometimes when you film your dancing and you watch the clip, it feels like ‘shit, what am I doing?’. Like it doesn’t match with what I’m working with. It looks like chaos and it’s maybe because my eyes are not used to watch what I’m watching - because I look at myself - ‘the self’ - and I judge myself. […] The whole me is watching myself - it’s a difficult relationship between me and my practice, because I am me and I can’t step outside of me.

In this quotation, P4 expressed a difficulty of being an object and subject at the same time. As the Lacanian mirror stage theory suggest, if the mirror is present, it enforces the feeling of alienation of the subject from the unity. In the context of this theory we are able to understand the division: the subject is the one who experiences and the object is something that is being experienced. It seems clear that participant P4 has had a hard time, both separating, and connecting these two. How to be both a subject and an object at the same time? The one who watches, and the one who is being watched? In the mirrors, dancers may see themselves divided in two, both an object and a subject, the one who is at the same time observing and observed.

To present a comparison to all of the reflections above, participant P3 didn’t have any specific thoughts regarding the mirror image as a reflection of the self:

P3: I can see myself almost all the time but I don’t usually think about it so much. The mirror is there, I see myself, it can help me and I can choose to not to look at it. I can choose how much energy and time I’m going to spend on it. […] I see the mirror simply and concretely as a tool which often makes it easier for me to follow the teacher, or to correct something that I do or don’t do.
7.1.2 Mirrors and sensitivity

During the interviews, all of the participants talked about how they feel more sensitive in a non-mirrored dance class. Here are a couple of citations from these discussions:

**P2**: I think dancing without mirrors benefits me more, because then I am more sensitive in my body and I don’t think how I look like. I think the mirror hinders my passion as well. It hinders my feelings - the things I want to express disappear - because if the mirror is there I have my focus outwards instead of finding things inside of me.

**P3**: When there is no mirror, there’s automatically more focus on the inside and on the senses - sensing movements, sensing dynamics. I do not want to say that they are two completely different things, like: ‘with mirror, I never feel anything and without mirror, I always feel.’ It’s not that extreme, but there is probably something in it.

In the context of Lacanian mirror stage theory, we can understand why these dancers have - without mirrors - a chance to feel like complete subjects and get more contact with their own feelings and sensations. Simultaneously they find an exit out of the subject-object division and alienation. In this state subjects are able to be sensitive and have full focus on their sensations, senses and feelings. The mirror, instead, disrupts the contact with inner sensations and divides these students in two parts: inside and outside. Perhaps mirrors offer too many sensations at the same time, and the dancers don’t get focused on the inner senses to the same extend than when they dance without the mirrors’ presence. They have focus on themselves both from the inside and from the outside. The visual sensations become overpowering in comparison to all the other senses. Participants P1 and P3 had more reflections about this discussion:

**P1**: I appreciate that the mirror is not present when we have contemporary dance classes, because then there is an ongoing exploration of movement - often I go so deep in myself, and if the mirror is there, it distracts me. Then I can’t get into what I have in me, but instead I have to think about what's outside of me. But sometimes it's nice to have the mirror in class because then it can help me like a tool - I can see, I can understand, I can capture details easier. But if the movement material sits in my body, then the mirror does not have to be there for me. Then it doesn’t help me - instead it can limit me because it makes me think visual things, and not the deeper work inside me. Dance is not just visual - it also has to be interesting to me.

**P3**: It may depend on what you’re doing, because sometimes it may be that you should explore movement within yourself. Then it may be distracting to see yourself in the mirror. But I assume that depends a lot on the mood you are on that day.

My interpretation of these quotations is that the mirror functions as a distracting component - it seems to divide students’ concentration, and therefore it distracts from the possibility to
concentrate on senses and sensitivities. A mirror gives these dancers the opportunity to explore their inner experiences through outside components - it functions as a window to a meeting with ‘the self’, and I think that the students become occupied by this meeting. Thereby, the visual information provided by the mirror hinders these students to experience and explore their inner sensations. In the context of Lacanian mirror stage theory, it’s possible to claim that without mirrors these dancers could possibly feel more like complete subjects: like small children before they meet their own mirror image for the first time - totally occupied by their inner sensations. In front of mirrors, instead, the subject is divided in two - outside and inside, which makes it hard for these students to be fully focused on what’s happening in the inside. The mirror seems to be distracting, and it affects dancers’ relations to themselves.

7.1.3 Summary

Some of the students in this study experienced alienation from themselves as unified subjects. They had a hard time both separating with the sensing and thinking subject from the object seen in the mirror and connecting with it. It became clear to me that the gaze plays a huge part in this experience. Without seeing, it’s not possible to get in contact with the picture presented by the mirrors. It was also perceptible that participants P2 and P4 experienced that there is a clear distinction between the outer and inner selves, which makes them able to feel that these ‘selves’ do not always match with one another. The relation to the mirror seems to be shifting in relation to the object-subject relationship. It was also clear that these students felt that mirrors foreclose the possibility of being sensitive in their bodies. The visual sensations provided by the mirror distract these students from focusing on their inner experiences of themselves and, therefore, they seem to lose the connection to ‘the self’.

7.2 Mirrors and evaluative gaze

I start this section by presenting quotations from the discussions where participants were talking about factors that affect the way they feel about their mirror images. These discussions led to conversations of value and evaluation, which is presented and analyzed later in this section. During the interviews, I discovered that there seems to be a connection between different moods and the way these students feel about their mirror images. All four participants mentioned something about a good and a bad day, or a good and a bad mood, and the fact that it affects their feeling of themselves and of their mirror images. Below are a couple of quotations from these discussions:
P1: It’s emotional seeing yourself in the mirror. I mean, if I have a bad day and I see myself in the mirror, it makes me feel horrible - then it’s not so nice to see myself. But sometimes it’s kind of nice to see myself - if I see that I succeed in something - to allow one to reflect on how good one did today. To be able to see it yourself, because otherwise it’s only others who see it.

P2: It depends on the day - sometimes, when you have a good mirror day, or if you feel good about yourself, then it can be nice to see yourself. But other days, it’s more like ‘oh well, there I am’ and I think nothing special about it, I just exist in the mirror.

In these quotations, it becomes clear, how the participants experience days when they do not feel good when they see themselves in the mirrors, and vice versa. But what makes these students to enjoy or dislike watching their mirror images - why are there good and bad mirror days? I got couple of reflections of that as well:

P1: It's always nice to see when you succeed in something. That you have learned something, or the material sits in your body, or the body has understood, I’ve understood. But it feels bad to see myself if the material doesn’t sit in my body, or it’s not really my thing, or it doesn’t really work in my body, or if I can’t stand behind it - then it’s really annoying to see yourself, to do something just because you have to.

P3: If I see that I do something wrong, then I feel like: ‘damn!’ it’s a negative feeling. And if I see that I do something well, then it’s a good feeling.

These dancers get a positive feeling when they see that they did something well, and a negative feeling when they did something not so well. It is a discussion of value and evaluation, and I continue that discussion in this section. Participant P1 said:

P1: I appreciate when the mirror isn’t there, because then there is no evaluation in my work and it’s not possible for me to judge myself. If I can’t see myself, it gives me the opportunity to just feel - feel how I experience the movement. It gives a totally different relation to my dancing - if I can’t visually see it. The mirror makes me think aesthetically good or aesthetically pretty, and I watch myself to evaluate myself.

With the help of post-humanistic perspective, we can gain understanding of this discussion. The mirror is not just something passive. The mirror is an object, a tool, and it actively participates in the creation of evaluation. I anticipate that there is always evaluation in us, but the mirror seems to play an active part in the evaluation of the ‘outer self’. It demands the dancers to see themselves from an outside perspective, and because dance is an aesthetic art form, it has standards of what is good and bad. The mirror functions as active agent for us to evaluate ourselves, our body, our looks, our movements and our dancing. But who decides what is good or bad? P1 continued:

P1: A dance class without mirrors gives me the opportunity to be much more courageous - I can push myself further, and I feel freer. […] I don’t need to think how everything looks
like, which is nice. Then I can just do. I think you'll gain a lot from just doing. So that you don’t get stuck with what it looks like - it looks good, it always looks good, there’s nothing that says it looks bad, except me. So just do - and don’t think about it so much.

As participant P1 expressed it, without a mirror the dancer is the one who has full control of the evaluation of her/himself. With mirrors s/he feels controlled and evaluated, and without them s/he feels freer and courageous. P1 also expressed the need to not focus on the aesthetics, but instead just feeling and sensing. This is discussed further in the next section.

To sum up, different factors affect the way these students feel about themselves; mood and the feeling of success being the main ones. In the context of post-humanistic perspective, we can understand that the mirror is an active agent, which centralizes the gaze of the dancer to her/himself, and forces one to focus on her/his own body and performance. The mirror creates a self-centered gaze, but instead of concentrating on the self as an inner experience, the mirror makes the dancer to focus on the aesthetics. The focus is on ‘the self’, mainly from the outside perspective, but also, which is interesting, the mirror restrains these students to sense and feel the same way they do without mirrors. The mirror, with its active role of creating self-reflections of our bodies, makes it possible for us to evaluate ourselves either negatively or positively in terms of looks, aesthetics and performances.

7.3 Mirrors and the outside world

In this section, I introduce discussions where students were reflecting on how mirrors foreclose the outside world. I experienced that the mirror seems to seduce these participants with its reflection, and thereby it affects how these students sense the world outside of them.

Students P2 and P4 said:

P4: I’ve directed my focus towards the mirror, instead of having empathic spatial work, around me, behind me. So, without the mirror my whole body can be included, because it’s the sensory space that I have. There’s also a tighter relationship between bodies without a mirror - understanding the space and time and place.

P2: I get better contact with myself and with my whole body without mirrors. I think I’m using my entire body in another way, when I don’t have a mirror, because then I can go into myself and I can think about my whole body. I don’t look at myself, I don’t look at any picture - I feel, I hear people, I sense the people behind me. I know who is behind me and I know how far away the person behind me is. I become more sensitive - my whole presence is directed more outwards, than just forward. I think that I use more space when I’m dancing. I see others, I see everyone, I observe everyone around the room, I can sense time within everyone, I hear people better. I sense if someone moves behind me.

As it can be understood from these answers, mirror seems to function as a shielding tool. It shields dancers from the things that are happening inside them, but also from things that are
happening in the room. From the post-humanistic perspective, we can understand, that the mirror as an active agent provides a seducing reflection. With mirrors these dancers seem to have tunnel vision - all the focus is on ‘the self’ instead of seeing and sensing everything that is happening in the room. The room, and other dancers in it, somehow disappear. The students seem to have full focus on themselves from the outside, instead of getting into a deeper relation with others in the room, and to time and space, and therefore mirror forecloses contact with the world outside. The mirror seduces these students with its reflection and that is why these dancers felt more sensitive and connected with the space around them without mirrors than with them.

To sum up, from the post-humanistic point of view we can understand that the mirror is an active agent which creates a possibility to be shielded from the outside world. All attention is directed towards the mirror, instead of the space around these students. The visual information provided by the mirror creates a tunnel vision and hinders these students to sense and experience others in the room, as well as time and space.

7.4 Mirrors and two-dimensional experiences

In this section, I’ll present discussions where the participants were talking about two- and three-dimensionality regarding mirrors. Several of the students experienced some kind of two-dimensionality, flatness, when the mirrors were present, and in contrast they felt more three-dimensional without mirrors. Participant P3 said:

**P3:** If a student is standing a meter from my right side, I can just turn around instead of looking at the mirror to look at her. It feels closer and I feel that I can get the whole 3D experience. The mirror is more 2D, it’s flat on the wall.

**P3:** I could say that the experience of myself becomes wider without mirrors. I feel the movement starting from within and expanding out. I can see myself from my own point of view and I feel wider. But in the mirror, I am flat. Again, it’s not black and white, but without mirrors I have more focus on myself - I feel broad and deep, and maybe big and small at the same time. But with the mirrors the experience is more flat, more 2D.

From the post-humanistic perspective we can understand that the mirror, a flat object, is actively participating in the creation of this two-dimensional experience. Participants P2 and P4 took this discussion further and also mentioned how they see themselves only from the front:

**P4:** The mirror creates a rather one-dimensional image of myself. I look at myself and see only the front side of myself because the mirror is flat. But I’m three-dimensional. The
whole three-dimensionality, it disappears, because I'm very busy looking at myself in the mirrors while I’m dancing.

P2: I feel disconnected from myself in a dance class with mirrors. I’m not so aware of who I have around me, who are in my class. I feel limited because I can’t see so well and the mirror is the only picture I have and I can’t see the details. […] The mirror becomes the only thing I can relate to and then it becomes a limitation. I do not feel round, I feel flat, because I only get to see the front side of myself.

Both of these students expressed one difficulty with mirrors: we can only see the front sides of ourselves. The mirror is flat, and we have eyes only on the front side of our body. This is why mirrors create flat and two-dimensional image of us.

To sum up, the mirror, as a flat object, offers a possibility to see oneself as two-dimensional. This is why we, as three-dimensional human beings, may find it hard to connect with the picture. It’s also possible for us only to experience the picture from our front side, which creates the experience of the self as flat and two-dimensional.

7.5 Summary of the results

In conclusion, it’s clear that these participants have different relationships with, and reflections on mirrors. But as the post-humanistic theory suggests, the mirror seems to be an active agent in creating these relationships. The mirror creates an evaluating gaze and two-dimensional bodies, but it also distracts and shields from having relations to the self, to the others, the room, time and space. It affects dancers’ sensitivity and generates objectification, an object-subject relationship. The object-subject relationship can be interpreted on the basis of the Lacanian mirror stage theory. A subject, dancer, sees a picture of her/himself presented by the mirrors. That can create an alienation from the subject as a unity - the whole sensing, feeling and thinking self. The gaze plays a huge part in this process, because without seeing, we cannot experience the image presented by the reflecting wall. The mirror makes these dancers to focus on the aesthetics of themselves and their dancing, and makes them to lose connection with the inner self. They have more focus on the outside of themselves than on the inside. All participants mentioned that they were more sensitive without mirrors in the dance class, than with them.

The results suggest that the mirror is clearly a distracting tool, which affects the way these participants feel about themselves and their dancing. Through mirrors, the contemporary dance pedagogy students experience themselves rather as flat and two-dimensional objects, than living, thinking, breathing and three-dimensional subjects. This flat object becomes a
target to evaluation and exploration, which distracts participants to feel the sensations inside themselves. This may also lead to disconnection from the self, the others, the room, the time and the space.

8 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to research, inspired by the post-humanistic theory and the Lacanian mirror stage theory, how mirrors affect contemporary dance pedagogy students’ experiences of themselves. The research was accomplished by executing semi-structured interviews with four third-year dance pedagogy students at the School of Dance and Circus in Stockholm, Sweden. A post-humanistic point of view made it possible to understand and explain how mirrors function as active agents, and the Lacanian mirror stage theory created the basis for discussions on the gaze and the object-subject relationship. In the previous chapter, “Analysis of the results”, I identified four themes regarding the research question and the sub-questions of this research: 1. Mirrors and the object-subject division, 2. Mirrors and evaluative gaze, 3. Mirrors and the outside world, 4. Mirrors and two-dimensional experiences. These themes were related to the theoretical perspectives of this study. In the following section the different parts of the report will be tied together, including the research overview and results. That will be done regarding the sub-questions of this research.

8.1 How do students of contemporary dance pedagogy relate to their own mirror images?

In this section, I will discuss objectification, object-subject relationship, gaze and evaluation regarding to the results of this study, as well as the articles presented in the research overview.

Overall, it seems that the results presented in this study support many of the results in the studies on the research overview. It was evident, that some students experienced themselves as objects when they saw themselves in the mirrors. In the study accomplished by Radell et al. (2014), the researchers came into a similar conclusion: many students will disassociate their somatic selves from the reflection presented by the mirrors, and therefore they view themselves as objects rather than kinesthetic human beings. According to my interpretation, the subject her/himself experiences the picture presented by mirrors as an object and alienates from the subject as a unity. Therefore, the picture presented by mirrors may not match with our inner feeling of ourselves. Purser (2011) discussed the same phenomenon by suggesting that mirrors may lead to objectification and alienation. Researchers Dearborn et al. (2006)
were also in accord, stating that mirrors invite one to see the self from the outside. In conclusion, mirrors seem to divide the self into two, both outside and inside, and therefore they offer a platform for exploration, evaluation and comparison. Radell et al. (2014) continued, that dancers often tend to compare the object seen in the mirrors to an ideal image present in the environment and if the body doesn’t match the ideal, it may lead to a negative self-evaluation. In my research, the students didn’t express particularly negative evaluation, but they experienced that the mirror itself creates a platform for, both positive and negative, self-evaluation. The reflecting walls invite these students to scrutinize the images of themselves from the outside of themselves.

It was also evident, that the gaze is needed in order to experience the image presented by the mirrors. The gaze seemed to create a function where students were highly self-concentrated and lost sensitivity and connection with ‘the self’, others and the world outside of them. Brodie and Lobel (2008) referred to this function as the eyes-glued-to-the-mirrors phenomena, and explained that if the mirrors are present, other sensory systems need to compete with visual information for attention. In my study, I experienced that in these cases, the mirror acted as a shield - shielding from the things that are happening inside and around these dancers. Radell (2013) came into a similar conclusion: she wrote that it’s problematic when a dancer pays too much attention to the image s/he sees of her/himself in the mirror, because this self-consciousness may overpower dancer’s own internalized sense of her/his body as it moves through space.

Something that didn’t come up in the articles presented in the research overview, was that different moods and the feeling of success affected the way these students felt about themselves and their mirror images. All of the participants in this study experienced that good and bad ‘mirror days’ were dependent on how well they felt that they performed in a dance class. The mirrors as active agents offered opportunity for these students to see themselves succeeding or not-succeeding, and therefore made them to enjoy or dislike watching their own mirror images.

To sum up, my study deepens the results in former research, adding specifically contemporary dance pedagogy students’ reflections about the phenomena to the discussion. To conclude, the answer to the question “How do students of contemporary dance pedagogy relate to their own mirror images?” is that the relationship varies between different students, situations and is highly dependent on different moods and the feeling of success. It was evident that the
mirrors as active agents offer the possibility to scrutinize oneself from the outside as an object, dividing ‘the self’ - a living, breathing and thinking subject, in two. Therefore, dancers may lose contact with the ‘inner self’, as well as the world around them. Some of the students didn’t feel that their inner experience of themselves matched with the image presented by the mirrors. The mirror image may also create unnecessary evaluation and self-concentration, and the dancers may lose their sensitivity while focusing on their own mirror images. I think that in dance, and especially in contemporary dance, sensing and sensitivity are rather important values, and if the mirror makes dancers lose contact with themselves, time and space, it’s not the best possible tool to have in a dance class, at least all the time.

8.2 How do contemporary dance pedagogy students’ experiences of themselves and their dancing differ in mirrored and non-mirrored conditions?

In this part, I focus on flatness, two- and three-dimensionality, distraction and contact with the world outside of dancers, regarding to the results of this study, as well as the articles presented in the research overview.

Again, some of the former studies approved the results of my study. It was evident that the mirrors gave these dancers the opportunity to experience themselves as flat and two-dimensional, and mirrorless environments made them feel more round, wide and three-dimensional. Flatness, two- and three-dimensionality were also discussed by Ehrenberg (2010), Diehl (2016) and Radell et al. (2014). Ehrenberg (2010) mentioned that the mirror gives an inaccurate reflection that does not represent a three-dimensional person, and Radell et al. (2014) wrote that the image presented in mirrors is not the same with real life three-dimensionality. Diehl (2016) mentioned a detail that also came up in my study: she wrote that when the body is only seen from the front, the image becomes flat and superficial. The mirror represents a front, a direction and it’s almost impossible for us as humans to look at the mirror from other directions than from the front. Therefore, we only get to see the front side of our bodies, instead of the three-dimensional reality, and that is why these students experienced themselves as flat when the mirrors were present.

A theme that was not discussed in the previous articles, was how mirrors affect dancers’ sensitivity about the world outside of them. In this study, it became clear that mirrors make these dancers have a tunnel vision and focus mainly on the self, instead of being aware of the others and the space around them. Without mirrors the dancers were more focused on the
things that were happening in the room. Therefore, I experienced that the mirror had a shielding effect, shielding these dancers from having contact with time, space and others.

Even though the mirrors’ shielding affect didn’t come up in the previous studies, there were a couple of researchers writing about mirror as a distraction. In a study by Dearborn et al. (2006), the conclusion was that dance students with mirrored environment found it most difficult to pay attention when learning and performing in a dance class. Radell, Adame and Cole (2004) mentioned that the use of a mirror was distracting regarding to classroom performance. I came into a similar conclusion: the mirrors’ shielding affect distracted these students from concentrating on other things than the looks of themselves.

To sum up, the answer to the question “How do contemporary dance pedagogy students’ experiences of themselves and their dancing differ in mirrored and non-mirrored environments?” is that in a mirrored context dancers feel more flat and two-dimensional and in a non-mirrored context they feel more three-dimensional, round and wide. The mirror also affects dancers’ concentration in a dance class. It’s hard for them to focus on other things than just themselves when the mirror is present and therefore, the mirror functions as a shield, shielding these students from being aware of the world outside of them.

8.3 Evaluation of methods

The purpose of this section is to evaluate the methods used in this research.

In my opinion, the choice of using qualitative semi-structured interviews worked well in this study, because I was interested in the interviewees’ experiences instead of statistics or ‘the absolute truth’. This method helped me to get wide reflections from the participants, because I could ask follow-up questions and change the order of the questions. I experienced that my interview template worked well and fulfilled its purpose by getting important reflections to this report. Afterwards, I can question myself as an interviewer, because I feel that I could have asked even more follow-up questions or asked the participants to explain certain thoughts to get even deeper answers. Concerning the selection of interviewees, I could have picked more students to get even more heterogeneous group of participants. For example, it would have been interesting to have participants from other schools, genders, ethnicities etc. It would also have been interesting to interview the same participants again after a couple of weeks and see if the first interview would have changed or deepened the answers.
8.4 Pedagogical perspective and suggestions for future research

In this section of the study, I discuss the results regarding to dance pedagogical perspective. I also share my own reflections of how this study affected me and share some suggestions for the future research.

Directly after I began to work with this thesis, I started to be much more aware of mirrors, and how I, and others, used them. During this process, I have also started to analyze my own and others’ gazes - registering how we look at ourselves through the mirrors. My thoughts of the mirrors have not considerably changed, but I have somehow grown to be even more critical of mirrors, trying to avoid spending too much time in front of them in a dance studio. This process has made me a lot more aware of mirrors, both as a dancer, but also as a future dance pedagogue. On that account, I experience that mirrors are problematic - they can be helpful, but there are also many things that can affect the dancers in a negative way. Therefore, I think that dancers, as well as dance pedagogues, should make an active decision of using or not using mirrors, and understanding the reasons behind these choices.

Suggestions for the future research would be to attach the gender perspective in the research of mirrors. Many of the researchers in this field have investigated women’s experiences of mirrors without actively focusing on the female gender in their analysis. It would be interesting to gain knowledge of what kind of impact mirrors may have on dancers’ experiences of stereotypic ideals of gender.

8.5 Conclusion

In this section, I summarize the new knowledge this study provides to the field.

Even though in the previous sections there were several things that came up both in this study but also in the former studies, I still think that my study deepened the knowledge of how mirrors impact on the experience of ‘the self’. The post-humanistic perspective helped to clarify that mirrors are active agents that participate in several things, for example, they create an evaluating gaze, objectification, alienation from the subject as a unity, experience of two-dimensional bodies and distraction. It became also evident that the mirrors actively shield dancers from sensing their ‘inner selves’ as well as the others in the room, time and space. This means that the mirror, an object, does something and is agentic, instead of thinking that the dancer is the only active part in the dancer-mirror relationship. One of the things that my research brought forth was that the feeling of success and mood affect the way dancers feel
about their mirror images and themselves. The dancers enjoyed watching themselves in mirrors, when they performed well, and vice versa.

Inspiration from the Lacanian mirror stage theory deepened the discussion of mirrors and the subject-object relationship. In the previous studies, the concept of objectification was discussed slightly, but in my research the discussion became deeper. In this thesis, the results showed that the mirror creates a distinction between inner and outer selves. The subject gets to experience oneself from the outside of ‘the self’, and therefore experiences alienation and may lose sensitivity of her/his body. The focus, the gaze looks the self externally, evaluating the body and its movements, instead of internally, sensing the movement within.

To conclude, the mirror seems to be a significant factor in dancers’ training and affects several aspects of their lives, including experience of ‘the self’. The relationships with mirrors, and with the images presented by them, vary between different students and situations. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to encompass all or majority of dance students or situations, yet this study can, through its theoretical perspectives, interviews and analyzes, give a possibility to understand certain patterns which can be found in other studies with similar conditions.
9 List of References


**Empirical data**

Transcriptions and recordings from interviews: P1 200318, P2 210318, P3 230318 and P4 280318 in private possession by Greta Kella.
Appendices

Appendix 1 – information to participants
Appendix 2 – interview template (English)
Appendix 3 – interview template (Swedish)
Appendix 1 – information to participants

Mirrors’ impact on dancers’ experiences of themselves

The main motivator behind this research is the desire to explore what kind of identities are experienced through objects, in this specific case mirrors. The purpose of the degree project is to find out how mirrors impact on contemporary dance pedagogy students’ experiences of themselves at DOCH (School of Dance and Circus - Stockholm University of the Arts). During this project, I’m going to interview four students who study their third year at DOCH.

Different aspects of mirrors are going to be discussed in these interviews, and the material and data gathered from them are being analyzed in this study. The questions are in English or Swedish, depending on the participant.

It would be very significant if you could participate in this degree project because you belong in the specific target group and I thought that you could be a great asset to this study. Your participation could generate a wider perspective of the phenomena that is being discussed.

Participant

- Your participation in this research project is optional and you have the right to end your cooperation without negative consequences.
- The source data collected during this project is not going to be used on other purposes than this specific research project.
- The results of this study are going to be available at DOCH’s library and DIVA portal.
- Your privacy and the confidentiality of personal information is protected to minimize the impact of the study on your physical, mental and social integrity.
- Your statements are going to be published after your approval.

Thank you for participating in this degree project!

Greetings,

Greta Kella
School of Dance and Circus, The Bachelor’s Programme in Dance Pedagogy
Appendix 2 – interview template (English)

- Who are you? Name, age?
- What is your background in dance?
- What do you do in dance field at the moment?

Dancer/mirror
- Do you think that mirrors are something that are often used in dance classes?
- What kind of relationship do you have with mirrors in dance classes?
- What do you look at in the mirrors when you are dancing?
- How does it make you feel when you see yourself in the mirrors in a dance class? Why?
- What is enjoyable when you see yourself dancing in the mirrors? Why?
- What is not enjoyable when you see yourself in the mirrors? Why?
- How much do you focus on the mirrors in a dance class?
- Does the mirror help or hinder your learning ability? How?

Dancer / the others
- Are you aware that others can see you through the mirrors? How does it affect you?
- Do you look at the others through the mirrors? Why and how?
- Do you compare yourself to others through mirrors?

Overall reflections of mirrors
- How do you experience a non-mirrored dance class and a mirrored dance class? What is the difference between these experiences?
- How does your experience of yourself differ in mirrored and non-mirrored dance class?
- Which one do you prefer: mirrored or mirrorless environment? Why?
- Did this interview give you any new thoughts? If so, what?
- Thank you for all the valuable information, is there anything else you would like to add?
Appendix 3 – interview template (Swedish)

- Vem är du? Namn, ålder?
- Vad är din bakgrund inom dans?
- Vad gör du nu inom dansfältet?

Dansare/spegel
- Upplever du att spegel är något som ofta brukar användas under dansklasser?
- Vad har du för relation till spegeln på dansklass?
- Vad tittar du på i spegeln när du dansar?
- Hur känns det när du ser dig själv i spegeln under dansklass? Varför?
- Vad känns bra när du ser dig själv i spegeln under dansklass? Varför?
- Vad känns mindre bra när du ser dig själv i spegeln under dansklass? Varför?
- Hur mycket focus har du på spegeln när du dansar?
- Hjälper eller hindrar spegeln din inlärning? Hur?

Dansare/andra
- Brukar du tänka på att andra kan se dig genom spegeln? Hur påverkar det dig?
- Brukar du titta på dem andra igenom spegeln? Hur? Vilket syfte?
- Jämför du dig med andra genom spegeln?

Övriga reflektioner om spegeln
- Hur upplever du en dansklass med speglar och en dansklass utan speglar? Vad är skillnaden av upplevelsen?
- Hur skiljer sig upplevelsen av dig själv på en dansklass med speglar och en dansklass utan speglar?
- Vad föredrar du: dansklass med speglar eller utan speglar? Varför?
- Har du fått några nya tankar efter denna intervju? I så fall, vad?
- Tack för din medverkan, är det något annat du skulle vilja lägga till?