**UC Santa Barbara**
**UC Santa Barbara Electronic Theses and Dissertations**

**Title**
Dancing While Black: Managing Racial Fatigue in Ballet

**Permalink**
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8148w1tx

**Author**
Robinson, Sekani L.

**Publication Date**
2022

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

# Dancing While Black:

# Managing Racial Fatigue in Ballet

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Sociology

by

Sekani L. Robinson

Committee in charge:

Professor Tristan Bridges, Co-Chair

Professor France Winddance Twine, Co-Chair

Professor Victor Rios

Professor Hannah Wohl

June 2022

The dissertation of Sekani L. Robinson is approved.

Victor Rios

_____________________________________________

Hannah Wohl

_____________________________________________

Tristan Bridges, Committee Co-Chair

_____________________________________________

France Winddance Twine, Co-Chair

_____________________________________________

May 2022

Dancing While Black:

Managing Racial Fatigue in Ballet

Copyright © 2022

By

Sekani L. Robinson

Acknowledgements

The beauty of academia is being able to learn and share knowledge and throughout this project and throughout my time in graduate school, I have been able to engage in this beauty of shared knowledge and learning. These acknowledgements are a reduced form of those musings. I thank my respondents also known as my *cast* for their time, their enthusiasm, their transparency, and their generosity in sharing their rich, influential, and important stories and thoughtful reflects.

I am also grateful for TaKiyah Wallace and Brown Girls Do Ballet. I started interning with Brown Girls Do Ballet around 2014-2015 and TaKiyah has been nothing but supportive of me and my work. She has provided me with space and a platform to network with other dancers as well as connected me with a significant number of participants for this study, and to brainstorm and create projects and content surrounding Black and Brown ballet dancers. I am so grateful to have the opportunity to grow and build with this organization, and I am forever grateful to be associated with such an impactful organization.

I am also thankful to American Ballet Theatre's Summer Intensive –Orange County. Elizabeth (Lizzy) Aymong, Naomi Gewanter, Katherine Lydon and Val Quijada have all played a pivotal part in my research and my summer support. Working for ABT's Summer Intensive also allowed me to connect and network with people within the ballet industry. They also provided me with a platform to speak and teach my research and the history of Black ballet dancers to ballet students which really helped with my knowledge and confidence within discussing my research. They have been great support and very encouraging the entire way and I think you all for the opportunity to be a part of ABT's Summer Intensive. Thank you to my ballet friends, Noa Colvin and my summer intensive peeps.

I fell in love with sociology in my very first Sociology 1 undergraduate course taught by Mary Danico at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. Dr. Danico connected theory to everyday life through storytelling and interactive teaching. We would act out scenarios in class that demonstrated social inequality and it captivated me and became the moment that I knew I wanted to study sociology. From there she took me under her wing, introduced me to research and the McNair Scholars program, which changed my life, and supported me as I applied to graduate school, throughout my graduate school journey and beyond as I start my new tenure track position there. I am forever thankful that our paths crossed and that I have been able to find comfort, and support from you: thank you. I would also like to thank Faye Wachs for her constant support throughout my undergraduate and graduate journey. For introducing me to sociology of sport and encouraging me to attend the North American Society for Sociology of Sport and apply for the awards and thank you, Anthony Ocampo for your support with graduate school applications.

At the University of California –Santa Barbara (UCSB), I became the scholar and academic I am today from my dedicated and amazing committee. My Co-chair, Tristan Bridges, thank you. I remember when I first met Tristan, and sat down in his masculinities graduate course, and I told him that I had a hard time writing and that I did not think I was a good writer and from that moment he was the most supportive and encouraging towards me. Tristan really inspired me and made me more excited about academia through connecting me with scholars and research that fit my interest. Tristan has gone above and beyond anything I could have asked for and/or imagined as a mentor and I want to say this: Thank you. Thank you for not giving up on me and being patient with me. Thank you for your constant kind words and affirmations. Thank you for your detailed and constant feedback. Thank you for being with me every step of the way as I wrote my first article, pressed the submit button for my first article, checking in on me daily as I went on the job market, and being by my side as I endured the negotiation process. Thank you for guiding me through the academic profession. And most importantly, thank you for seeing me, believing in me, and allowing me to be myself –*a unicorn*, throughout this journey. My co-chair France Winddance Twine really challenged and inspired me to situate my research more broadly. Despite my initial interest, she encouraged me to explore my research through the lens of women, and work and she really ignited an interest in me that I do not think I would have explored without her encouragement. Through many great lunches, in Santa Barbara, Winddance provided great mentorship and support. She provided great feedback and advice while validating and acknowledging my thoughts and ideas, and that really meant a lot to me. Winddance has always been very genuine and compassionate, and she really provided a great amount of comfort for me throughout my graduate school journey, and I would like to thank her: Thank you for your compassion and support. Thank you for challenging me and uplifting me. Thank you for believing in me and encouraging me to be myself. Victor Rios has always been very supportive from the moment I met him. I always felt comfortable reaching out to him whenever I was having a hard time and I can always count on him being there for me. It really meant so much to me knowing that there was someone in the department that I can talk to when I felt like I didn't belong or was upset. He always listened to me and validated my feelings and I want to say, thank you. Hannah Wohl really introduced me and encouraged me to explore sociology of culture and served as a great inspiration to me and my academic interest. Hannah enthusiastically supported me and showed great interest in my topic the minute we met. I am very thankful to have gained insight from Hannah, and I am forever thankful for her introduction into the sociology of culture: thank you, Hannah.

Several other faculty members contributed to my scholarly development and influenced my work and experience in the department. Reg Daniels offered great insight about the program and academia. Reg has also been very supportive throughout my graduate school journey. Howard Winant offered great support and advice throughout my early stages of this project. He also introduced me to Black scholars outside of the department in which inspired me and provided me with the representation that I needed. Jean Beaman also provided me with great support especially throughout my process on the job market. I thank you all and the other faculty who provided support and encouragement to

me. Beyond UCSB, I would like to thank Adia Harvey Wingfield for your support, encouragement, and insight.

Navigating the administrative process of graduate school would have not been possible without the kind and efficient staff in the sociology department. Lisa Blanco, Christine Gorgita, Madhu Khemani, Erika Klukovich and Melissa Martinez. They have been such a pillar as I progressed through the program. They were always so kind to me. I enjoyed talking with Erika about her many travels and trips, Christine about her son and Lisa, Melissa, and Madhu, I always had a good laugh with, and they always made sure that I had everything I needed.

I was fortunate to experience graduate school with a group of very talented, creative, and great colleagues: Trevor Auldridge, Cristina Awadalla, Adam Burston, Anna Chatillon, Sarah Devoto, Nia Flowers Steinfeld, Annie Hikido, Jonathan Ibarra, Andy McCumber, Kendall Ota, Marisa Salinas, Quintarrius Shakir, Oscar Soto, Cierra Sorin, and Fátima Suárez –thanks to you all.  Thank you to Mark D. Shishim and the UCSB Academic Initiatives.

I am so thankful to my friends who I grew up with and friends that I have met along the way who have been with me throughout this journey, cheering me on, checking on me and just being great friends to me. Thank you, Shenelle Charlot, Jo'Leysha Cotton, Arena Knapper, Adrienne Lombard, Gabriella Marquez, Jamiela Mclinnis, Ashley Taylor, Naikea Ward, and the rest of my friends and homies who would check in on me, send supporting and encouraging messages, go on hikes with me, eat with me, and send funny comments that made me laugh. I appreciate all of y'all. To my yoga instructors and yogi friends, namaste. Thank you to my church –Bishop Holloway and family. Dante Kirkland, thank you.

Finally, I would like to thank my biggest supporters and mentors, my family. Their love, faith, and encouragement kept me going. To my aunt, my uncle and cousins, my grandmothers and family who are no longer here and of course my brother and my parents, Antonette Robinson and Jerome Robinson, it's been a long journey. I love you all and from the bottom of my heart, thank you.

*The following is an ode to Black Girls who dreamed of becoming a ballerina but did not feel like they fit the aesthetic. I write this to acknowledge you, to acknowledge us. Thank you.*

Sekani L. Robinson
Curriculum Vitae
June 2022
srobinson@ucsb.edu

Academic Appointments:

2022 – Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

Education:

Ph.D. Sociology
University of California, Santa Barbara, 2016-2022
Committee: Tristan Bridges (Co-Chair), France Winddance Twine (Co-Chair), Victor Rios and Hannah Wohl

M.A. Sociology
University of California, Santa Barbara, Sociology, 2016-2018

B.A. Sociology
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, Sociology, 2012-2016

Dissertation:

Robinson, Sekani. Dancing While Black: Managing Racial Fatigue in Ballet

Publications:

*Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles*

**Sekani Robinson**. 2021. Black Ballerinas: The Management of Emotional and Aesthetic Labor. Sociological Forum.

Tristan Bridges, Catherine J. Taylor, and **Sekani Robinson**. 2020. "Connections between Masculinity, Work, and Career Reproduce Gender Inequality." *Making it Like a Man: Men, Masculinities, and the Modern Career*, edited by Kadri Aavik, Clarice Bland, Josephine Hoegaerts, and Janne Salminen. Berlin, Germany: de Gruyter.

Fuqua, Juliana L., Wachs, Faye. L., Nissenson, Paul. M., Zhao, Yitong, Shih, Angela, Pedroza, Sophia, & **Robinson, Sekani**. 2019. Successful implementation of an online learning environment: Reducing the failure rate in a fluid mechanics course. *The ASEE Computers in Education (CoED) Journal*, *10*(3).

*Book Chapters*

**Sekani Robinson**. Forthcoming 2022. "Ballet: From Louis XIV to Misty Copeland." In *Milestones in Dance History,* edited by Dana Tai Soon Burgess, Taylor & Francis. Routledge Press.

*Work Under Review*

**Sekani Robinson**. Black Girls Do Ballet: How Race and Culture Shape Creative Industries. Under review at *Sociological Inquiry*.

*Journal Manuscript Reviewer*

| | |
|---|---|
| 2020 | *Men and Masculinities* |

---

Selected Awards and Honors:

| | |
|---|---|
| 2022 | SWS Cheryl Allyn Miller Award |
| 2021 | UCSB Dissertation Research and Writing Fellowship ($7,000) |
| 2021 | UCSB Humanities & Social Science Research Grant |
| 2021 | UCSB Kennedy/Graves Award for research related to Black Studies |
| 2020 | UCSB Doctoral Student Travel Grant |
| 2020 | ASA Sociology of Culture's COVID-19 Crisis Grant Award |
| 2020 | University of California, Santa Barbara Department of Sociology, Flacks Fund for the Study of Democratic Possibilities Award |
| 2019 | North American Society for the Sociology of Sport Barbara Brown Outstanding Student Paper Award recipient |

---

Invited Talks/Engagements:

| | |
|---|---|
| 2021 | Invited talk about Race, Gender and Sports, University of Hertfordshire, United Kingdom |
| 2021 | Invited lecture "Race, Racism, & Discrimination in Ballet" University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa |
| 2021 | Invited Podcast "Black Ballerinas: The Management of Emotional and Aesthetic Labor" Afrometrics Podcast: Research Based News |
| 2021 | Invited lecture "Black Swans: Controlling the Image of the Black Swan: Race, Gender, Class and the discourse around Black Women's Bodies in Ballet" Cal Poly Pomona, Pomona, California |
| 2021 | Invited lecture "History of Black Dancers in Ballet" UC Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, California |
| 2021 | Invited lecture, "History of Black Dancers in Ballet" St. Paul's School, Concord, New Hampshire |

| | |
|---|---|
| 2020 | Invited lecture, "Emotional and Aesthetic Labor of Black Women in Ballet" UC Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, California |
| 2020 | Panelist for State Violence, Anti-Blackness and the Black Student Experience by the Center for Black Studies Research at University of California, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, California |
| 2018 | University of California -Santa Barbara, Gender and Sexualities Workshop, Santa Barbara, California |

Professional Experience:

Teaching Associate for the following courses:

Women and Work (SOC 153)
Dance History: Ballet –George Balanchine (DAN 145B)

Teaching Assistant for the following courses:

Content Analysis Methods (Sociology 108), Theories of Race (SOC 185D), Women and Work (SOC 153), Social Inequalities (SOC 145), Gender Inequalities (SOC 185G), Women's Movements (SOC 155M), Sociology of the Body (SOC 118B)

Presentations:

| | |
|---|---|
| 2021 | Robinson, Sekani. "Controlling the Image of the Black Swan: Race, Gender, Class and the Discourse around Black Women's Bodies in Ballet"<br>Sociologist for Women in Society, Virtual |
| 2020 | Robinson, Sekani. "Black Swans: Black Women in Ballet and the Management of Emotional and Aesthetic Labor"<br>Sociologist for Women in Society, San Diego, CA |
| 2019 | Robinson, Sekani. "Black Swans: Black Female Ballet Dancers and the Management of Emotional and Aesthetic Labor"<br>American Sociological Association, New York, NY |

Public Sociology Work Experience:

| | |
|---|---|
| 2021 | Curated an exhibit at UC Santa Barbara titled, Black Swans as Activist: Capturing Black Dancers Protesting during COVID-19, June 2020-Present<br>https://www.news.ucsb.edu/2021/020159/moving-freely (Visual Sociology) |
| 2021 | Rivera Martinez, Arturo, Mejías-Pasceo, Sofia, et. al. "The 'Uphill Fight that the Black Community in America has Constantly Been Fighting Towards': UCSB and IV Community Speak on Black Lives Matter Movement." (Interviews Sekani Robinson) |

https://dailynexus.com/2020-08-22/the-uphill-fight-that-the-black-community-in-america-has-constantly-been-fighting-towards-ucsb-and-iv-community-speak-on-black-lives-matter-movement/

2017 July-Present — American Ballet Theatre (ABT) Summer Intensive Admistrator and teacher for Black history in ballet

2020 — Featured in Misty Copeland's Apple TV plus episode of *Dear…* series

2018 — Interview for Paloma, Ninette. Monique Meunier Joins UCSB Dance Department. Santa Barbara Independent. (Highlights Sekani Robinson) https://www.independent.com/2018/12/06/monique-meunier-joins-ucsb-dance-department/

2017 August-June 2018 — UC Consortium for Black Studies in California –Created, organized and publicized events and programs within the Black Studies department across UC campuses

2016-Present — Research Intern for Brown Girls Do Ballet -Assisted and included in their book The Ballerina's Little Black Book (2016)

---

Professional Affiliations and Committees:

2021 — North Hall Chair Search Committee

2020 — The Racial Justice Action Committee (RJAC) at University of California, Santa Barbara. Santa Barbara, CA.

2020-Present — Sociologies of Women in Society –Sister to Sister committee

2019-Present — American Sociological Association
Sex and Gender Student Concerns Committee (2021-2023)
Co-Organizer for Sociology of Sport session
(Section membership: Race, Gender and Class; Sociology of Culture; Sociology of Body and Embodiment)

2019-Present — North American Society for the Sociology of Sports

2015 — Student Member of the Pacific Sociological Association

2014-2016 — McNair Scholar
Thesis: *What's There to Cheer About?: How Cheerleading Affects Girls of Color's Ethnic-Identity"* Bronco Scholar Library at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona.

ABSTRACT

Dancing While Black:

Managing Racial Fatigue in Ballet

by

Sekani L. Robinson

In the classic ballet *Swan Lake*[i1], the black swan (Odile), is a role that is promiscuous, and seductive. Like Black women as a group, Odile is sexualized. Odette, the white swan, who represents purity, is the antithesis of the black swan. The paradox of *Swan Lake* is that Odette and Odile are both played by the same person. This is an example of the forms of discrimination that Black dancers face. In general, Black ballerinas, are denied the most valued and visible roles in ballet. They are not given a range of complexity. Black women are viewed through a monolithic lens that marginalizes them to a stereotype that is placed by racist patriarchal ideologies.

This dissertation provides the analysis of the racialized and gendered inequalities that Black women negotiate in the ballet industry. The emotional and aesthetic labor that Black women endure, display forms of inequality that are on unusual display in the


[1] *Swan Lake* was composed by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky and choreographed by Marius Petipa and was premiered at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg Russia on January 27, 1895

industry of elite ballet but also exist within other elite cultural spaces such as visual and performing art.

Since its inception in the late 14th and early 15th centuries, ballet has been an exclusive profession dominated by white Europeans. In the previous centuries, ballet was strictly for royal courtiers. During the reign of King Louis XIV, the French transformed and codified ballet into an elite artform. Five centuries after its birth, in Europe and the United States ballet remains a profession that mirrors anti-Black, employment discrimination and beauty hierarchies shaped by racism and colonialism.  I will employ a Black feminist lens to examine and to contribute a sociological analysis of a case that has been neglected by research on cultural fields –that is the experiences of Black creatives. Black Americans remain severely underrepresented in many creative industries, especially those that are considered elite of highbrow, such as ballet.

This dissertation draws upon interviews and survey research. I conducted 50 demographic surveys of Black women and men in the ballet industry. The survey includes 10 question which focus on childhood exposure to ballet, economic status, social and family resources. I conducted 58 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Black ballet dancers who have worked for primarily US-based ballet companies, during on point of their career. The participants included 20 Black women ballet dancers, 8 Black male ballet dancers, and 25 Black women who have not danced ballet professionally, I provide the first analysis of the strategies employed by Black women as they negotiate racial and gender ideologies about Black ballet dancers. I document the forms of cultural capital that they employ to enter and navigate working in this industry. I discuss how Black women challenge the monolithic ideologies by sharing the various ways in which

they maintain and or gain the cultural capital needed to enter the space of ballet. I provide a case study that illuminates the forms of discrimination that they encounter as Black ballet dancers face in the ballet industry.

My research examines the experiences of Black women in ballet. Like other creative occupations, ballet can best be characterized as *racialized social systems* that places unique demands upon the bodies of Black women. Black dancers experience racial fatigue or racial battle fatigue, which is define as racism-related stress and racial trauma (Franklin 2016) that leads to a physical exhaustion and underperformance. Black dancers are discriminated against through an aesthetic regime that promotes Eurocentric ideals of beauty. I provide an intersectional analysis of race and gender play a role in the experiences of Black ballet dancers. Black creatives experience a racialized constraint within the creative industry that affects their experience and access into these spaces from an intersectional lens. They also experience overt forms of discrimination through myths and stereotypes that are internalized by gatekeepers such as administrators.

I examine and define how Black bodies embody a racialized emotional and aesthetic labor. In ballet, the careers and experiences of Black women is shaped by structural racism, racial ideologies, and anti-Black aesthetic hierarchies and this provides a very specific racialized and gendered experience for Black women. Through subtle and sometimes blatant racism, Black women experience a *racial fatigue* from performing these intertwining forms of labor as the body/self affects each other in ways that served as a constant reminder that Black bodies were not wanted within ballet. Despite breaking some of these barriers, occupational racial segregation is reiterated here through racialized attire, criticism, and critiques of hair, in addition to even more overtly racist

comments. In sum, this dissertation contributes to studies of race, gender, culture, inequality, and embodiment by showing how creative occupations, continue to perpetuate exclusion by preserving racial, gendered, and classed *traditions* that have historically favored predominantly white elites.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1:
Curtain Time
…………………...……………………………………………………………… 1

Chapter 2: Act 1:
Ballet is [White]
Woman…………………………………………………………………..................... 21

Chapter 3: Act 2:
The Pas de Deux of Emotional and Aesthetic
Labor…………………………………………………………………………….... 56

Chapter 4: Act 3:
The Masculine Variation………………………………………………………… 76

Chapter 5: Conclusion
Curtain Close ……………………………………………… …………………… 96

References:
The Credits ……………………………………………………………………...… 105

Appendix:
Open Audition: Methodological Notes ……………………… …………………... 118

LIST OF TABLES

**Table 1.1:** Gender and Race Demographics of Dancers in Classical Ballet Companies Across the United States, 2018-2019

**Table 2.1:** Frequency and Proportion of Black Women Dancers Financial Support

**Table 3:1** Men in Ballet 2017-2018

**Table 3:2** Black Men in Ballet 2017-2018

---

# CHAPTER 1

## CURTAIN TIME

As fall transitions into winter, the time has come for The Nutcracker's annual winter season begins. This has been a tradition since 1954. Since summer, The New York City Ballet company begins intensive daily rehearsals day and night for this winter season. Aesha, a ballerina at for New York City ballet, and the other New York City Ballet dancers enters the David H. Koch Theater at Lincoln Center on the Upper West Side of Manhattan New York, hours before curtain call, with their ballet bags ready, and their ballet attire underneath their casual clothes. As they entered the theater, they walked on to the stage and placed the ballet barres in columns and took their place facing a barre. They stretch and warm up before the ballet master and ballet mistress walked in to start their technique class. While on the stage, they see stage lights shining towards them and an empty theater, the artistic director and other staff coming in and out, stage crew entering and exiting the stage –wearing all black, running back and forth to check the lighting and the curtains. There were props and backdrops being moved around and placed on stage for practice and an open pit where the orchestra members would soon begin to trickle in and sit down to begin their rehearsal before the show started.

The annual performance of The Nutcracker is one of the biggest and most intense seasons for many major ballet companies. There are many people involved from lighting and sound crews' production, and stage crews. More than 150 costumes being distributed and fitted and many people anticipating on attending to see the show. The Nutcracker makes about 45% of its annual ticket sales from its season (Levine 2021). New York City

Ballet, present about 47 performances of The Nutcracker, between November to January annually and The Nutcracker is one of the most complex and theatrically, staged ballets so everyone is one their toes and ready for the season.

After the company technique rehearsal, the dancers exit the stage, grab a quick snack and rest before the show begins. Some remain on stage to practice further with the choreographer and artistic director. Aesha walked backstage and placed her things down in her designated dressing room, backstage, and began to pull out her costume –as the Arabian Coffee Princess. She grabbed her long gold veil and harem costume made of gold, blue and red, and she placed it on the rail in her designated coat locker. She then pulled out her make-up. She took the sole red lipstick that the company provided her (while the other members received a full stage make-up kit that included lipstick, foundation, blush, and a few other items) and places it on her section of the dressing room table. She then pulled out the rest of her own make-up, that she bought, and placed it on the table. She began to put her make-up on. She does her full make-up and as she began to put the rhinestones, that the company provided with the costume, on her face, she deliberated and sorted through the rhinestones to decide on how many and which rhinestones she would use. She decided that she would only put a few rhinestones on her face because as she states, "I didn't put many rhinestones because I have dark skin, so you know I could just put one here and one there and that's going to show a lot. I decided to focus more on my makeup instead" As the only Black woman in the company[43], Aesha deliberated and strategically placed the rhinestones on her face, and while doing so, she overhears some of the other dancers say, "I want a big red one!" "I want a big blue one!"

and as Aesha states, “they really did it up because against the white skin you really see all of that.”

As the time gets closer, some began to straggle backstage as some continued to get ready in the dressing rooms, some sat on the hardwood floor stretching, others were breaking in their pointe shoes by continuously bending them, scrapping the bottle to give it more grip, and sewing on the elastic, all while the theater doors opened. As the doors opened, you can hear to roar of people talking as they walked to their seats and the seats began to fill up –majority of the audience members being white; all dressed in beautiful dresses, skirts, dress pants, suits, and ties. Taking off their coats and getting settled into their seats. The theater began to fill. From the people who sat in the front row of the orchestra pit, eye-level to the stage to the people way up in the last row of the balcony. As the show begins, the lights were dimmed and the orchestra began to play *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy*, a score written by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky in the late 1800s, and then the curtain opened. We saw dancers dressed as maids, butlers, chefs, nannies, and adult guest, guest (predominantly white) and partnered in heteronormative gendered outfits that resemble the 19th century we also saw children (predominantly from the School of American Ballet) mixed in with the company members as they played the children of some of the ‘guest’. Aesha was backstage, off on the wings, stretching, trying to keep her body warm and limber until it was her time to enter the stage. She was ready and prepared to grace the stage. It was then her time, and she went out on stage, in her Arabian costume, and performed the lead pas de deux for the Arabian Coffee scene. After the show ended, and as the audience left the theater, she, and the rest of the dancers, packed up and left. Aesha packed up her make-up, hair products, and everything else she

carried in her ballet bag, changed out of her costume, and gave it to the costume staff and headed home.

When she got home, she logged onto her computer to view a forum that had just started running –during the time she was at the company. The blog/forum was for ballet audience members to post their own personal reviews and critiques online and many of the ballet dancers would read them, especially if given lead roles, as Aesha did, for this Nutcracker season. As she eagerly looked online at the reviews, as she states, “I wanted to look on and see what people were saying and, one critic, audience member said along the lines of, it was just so disturbing to see Aesha up there looking just like Lil’ Kim. With her dramatic make up and *blonde wig."* As she shares this story with me, she laughs a little as continues, “I can laugh now but imagine a young adolescent me, you know like first time principal Nutcracker role, and you know… it destroyed me.” After Aesha read this comment, she stopped reading and cried. She was hurt by the comment and this comment as well as other stories similar stuck with her throughout her career and still till this day as she sat with me in the lobby of a hotel in San Jose to share her experience with me.

She described how this diminished her self-esteem and further added to the racial fatigue that ultimately led to her decision to end her career as a ballet dancer. Now, she is back in the ballet industry as a faculty member for a distinguished and well-known ballet school, she still holds on to memory, which still haunts her. Aesha’s story is not unique. Her experiences reflect a recurring pattern across interviews with dancers. Other Black women in this study narrated similar stories as they recalled their occupational histories.

While The Nutcracker is one of the most complex and theoretically staged ballets, it is also one of the most explicitly racist ballets. *The Nutcracker* holds gendered and racialized roles while inappropriately displaying "traditional" cultural customs – caricatures of Black, Latinx and Asian communities as seen in its Arabian, Coffee and Chinese variations. (Fisher 2018; Roberts 2019).

**Emotional And Aesthetic Labor**

In *The Managed Heart,* Hochschild (1983) analyzed the service economy and creates a new sub-field in sociology focusing explicitly on emotions. Hochschild conceptualizes "emotional labor" as: "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial *and bodily* display" (1983: 7, emphasis added), highlighting the management of feelings increasingly required in service sector occupations. An impressive body of scholarship on emotional labor finds that workers are compelled to enact specific emotional performances for clients in ways that reproduce hierarchies of power and inequality (e.g., Grandey 2000; Hoang 2010, 2015; Hochschild 1983; Maguire 2011; Mears and Finlay 2005; Murphy 2003; Paules 1996). Some scholars have also debated, revisited, and advanced the theorization of "emotional labor" to address the issue of race as well (e.g., Kang 2003, 2010; Wingfield 2010).

Mears and Finlay's (2005) analysis of emotional labor are illustrative of scholarship highlighting "emotional labor" more generally. In their study of professional models, they found that models deploy emotional labor to collect dignity and deflect the humiliation of constant rejection and bodily judgement they encounter at work. Yet, while Mears and Finlay's (2005) analysis foregrounds models' *emotional* labor, they also allude to issues of embodiment that others have identified and theorized as an analytically

separate form of labor— "aesthetic labor." As with most scholarship relying on emotional labor, Mears and Finlay do not also rely on "aesthetic labor" despite the embodied demands made in the industry they study. Consistent with work in both areas, these twin forms of labor are related to one another, as Entwistle and Wissinger (2006) argue, however, few scholars explicitly highlight this relationship.

This *analytical* trend is by *theoretical* design: aesthetic labor was first theorized as analytically distinct from emotional labor. Building on Hochschild (1983) emotional labor scholarship, Warhurst and Nickson (2001), and Witz, Warhurst and Nickson (2003) theorize "aesthetic labor" as:

> the employment of workers with desired corporeal dispositions… These dispositions are, to an extent, possessed by workers at the point of entry to employment. However, and importantly, employers then mobilize, develop, and commodify these dispositions through processes of recruitment, selection, training, monitoring, discipline, and reward, reconfiguring them as "skills" intended to produce a "style" of service encounter (2003: 107).

Here, they argue that aesthetic labor focuses on embodied performances. While Warhurst and Nickson (2003) do address emotions as meaningfully connected with what they term "aesthetic labor," they argue that Hochschild's theory of "emotional labor" does not address these forms of embodied labor in great detail. Indeed, Witz, Warhurst and Nickson (2003) favor the term *aesthetic labor* over emotional labor because it focuses primarily on embodiment. Further, Witz, Warhurst and Nickson (2003) initially conceptualized "aesthetic labor" as needing to be termed as separate from "emotional labor":

> [W]e feel that the concept of emotional labour foregrounds the worker as a mindful, feelingful self, but loses a secure conceptual grip on the worker as an embodied self. Embodiment is continually evoked… yet the precise status of corporeality… in the managed production of feeling is analytically abandoned (Witz, Warhurst, and Nickson 2003: 36).

Later, they suggest that emotional labor “is impeded by the way in which the corporeal aspects are retired” (Witz, Warhurst and Nickson 2003: 35). Similarly, Speiss and Waring write that “emotional labour, by itself, does not offer a sufficiently nuanced explanation” arguing that aesthetic labor is more comprehensive in ways that position emotional labor as offering a less nuanced concept (Speiss and Waring 2005: 198). Here, Speiss and Waring (2005) explicitly conceptualize aesthetic labor by separating embodiment from emotions.

Occupations such as modeling, athletics and ballet are useful service occupations to examine because of the way that bodies are very explicitly commodified. These occupations also allow a nuanced examination of how aesthetic labor needs to include the embodied self “body/self,” which includes both the physical *and* emotional aspects of maintaining specific appearances for particular jobs. Such occupations have strict (and often racialized) requirements about appearance for all workers, but more specifically for women. Many of these occupations require specific diets and exercise regimes. For women in particular, they even have to look after their skin, shave, wax or pluck bodily hair, maintain their hair, have a specific body image and dress in very specific ways. Challenging these requirements comes with consequences that shape employability. Notably, Entwistle and Wissinger (2006) and Mears (2008, 2014) do examine the work required to produce an appropriately attractive body for work.

Aesthetic labor also goes beyond work, which Witz, Warhurst and Nickson (2001) neglect to fully acknowledge. For instance, they do not acknowledge how aesthetic demands might structure things like weight management in order to “keep up

appearances" at work (Entwistle and Wissinger 2006: 777 and 780-781). As Entwistle and Wissinger state, "We know very little about the aesthetic labour of non-organizational bodies" (Entwistle and Wissinger 2006: 781). Not only have Witz, Warhurst and Nickson (2003) neglected to address non-service work, they have also neglected how Hochschild *does* address this connection when distinguishing between what she labels "surface acting" from "deep acting":

> The body, not the soul, is the main tool of the trade. The actor's body evokes passion in the *audience's* soul, but the actor is only *acting* as if he had feeling… This is surface acting—the art of an eyebrow raised here; an upper lip tightened there (Hochschild 1983: 37-38).

Hochschild's theorization of emotional labor alludes to both forms of emotional and aesthetic labor as having a kind of symbiotic relationship. Yet, this aspect of her work has been underappreciated. Whether or not theorists of "aesthetic labor" intended this, analyses of emotional and aesthetic labor in workplaces have been almost universally deployed separately in scholarship. By utilizing them separately, this body of scholarship has failed to fully appreciate the ways these forms of labor are necessarily intertwined to acknowledge both the flesh and feeling experience. I detail the ways that the body and self at work are intertwined in ways that are challenging to make sense of when emotional and aesthetic labor are treated as discrete forms of workplace demands. The Black women in ballet in this study demonstrate the utility of a more symbiotic understanding of the relationships between emotional and aesthetic labor and making sense of the intersecting forms of inequality these intertwining forms of labor produce and preserve.

**Ballet –An Elite Occupation in a Creative Industry**

Creative work and occupations, such as ballet, are structured by racial, class and gender inequalities that involve embodied labor (Wingfield 2010; Kang 2003;2010; Mears 2011). Ballet has been an exclusive, occupation established by European and European-Americans for many centuries. It is an elite occupational space that has sustained racial inequalities, beauty hierarchies and excluded generations of talented Black creatives and dancers. This occupation has ignored, marginalized, and excluded Black people. Like a great deal of culture in the United States, American ballet was highly influenced by Black culture and Blackness, stolen, and appropriated by White Americans while Black people remained devalued and excluded. George Balanchine—one of the said pioneers of American ballet in the mid 1930s—was heavily influenced by Black culture (Gottschild 1996)[44] but supported strict embodied forms of aesthetic labor for women that came to characterize "the ballerina" more generally (i.e., prepubescent, pure, elegant). Such an image worked in ways that further excluded Black women from ballet. Alongside this, historical "controlling images" of Black women as curvaceous, sexualized, and impure (e.g., Collins 1990) worked to systematically exclude Black women from ballet.

Like other occupations, dance is racially segregated. Labor systems organize and create occupational segregation in ways that ensure that racially ethnic workers are marginalized within specific occupations that works to maintain racial hierarchies (Barrera 1979; Blauner 1972; Nakano Glenn 1992). Since the invention of ballet in the late 14$^{th}$ early 15$^{th}$ centuries[45], it has been one of the most elite and exclusive dance forms primarily consumed primarily by elites. As ballet evolved, it retained its' prestige, due in

part to its' origins and association with Europe. Dance forms such as modern, contemporary, and hip hop are far more inclusive, in part because they are an American creation where Black people have played a central role as creatives. Indeed, participants in this study shared similar stories of being told that they would be a "better fit" outside of 'classical ballet'. Coral, a former ballet dancer, recalls:

> I was really strict with my vision of success at that age. I was like, well, I don't want to be pushed in a contemporary direction at all because I think that it can be very…very lightly veiled as racism, which is just kind of like you stay in your lane, this is what you do if you're going to be an entertainer. And like it is the overseeing White person who dictate how you do so. And so, I just felt very strongly that I want to choose, and I want to choose the most classical route possible because I really do enjoy ballet.

In 2018, Lauren Brown compares Asian American and Black representation in ballet to document the overrepresentation of Asian Americans and underrepresentation of Black Americans. While the odds of becoming a professional dancer are extremely slim for all ballet dancers[46], the prospects are even smaller for Black girls and women. Conversely, while there are less men than women within ballet as a whole, the numbers of Black women are lower than the numbers of Black men at the most elite levels of ballet. Black women make up less than 5% of ballet dancers in major companies throughout the United States (See Table 1). Black women occupy fewer than one in fifty dancers at this level. Additionally, the figures in Table 1 represent what are considered to be the highest ever rates of representation of Black women in ballet.

**Table 1.1: Gender and Race Demographics of Dancers in Classical Ballet Companies Across the United States, 2018-2019**

| | Women | Black Women | Men | Black Men | Total Dancers | Proportion of Black Women |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| American Ballet Theatre* | 54 | 3 | 40 | 3 | 94 | 3.19% |
| Atlanta Ballet | 14 | 0 | 14 | 3 | 28 | 0% |
| Boston Ballet | 26 | 1 | 29 | 5 | 55 | 1.82% |
| Houston Ballet† | 25 | 0 | 26 | 2 | 51 | 0.00% |
| Joffrey Ballet | 22 | 2 | 19 | 0 | 41 | 4.88% |
| Los Angeles Ballet | 19 | 1 | 12 | 0 | 31 | 3.23% |
| Miami City Ballet | 25 | 1 | 18 | 1 | 43 | 2.33% |
| New York City Ballet | 50 | 3 | 45 | 3 | 95 | 3.16% |
| Pacific Northwest Ballet | 24 | 1 | 18 | 0 | 32 | 3.13% |
| Pennsylvania Ballet | 20 | 0 | 17 | 1 | 37 | 0% |
| San Diego Ballet | 17 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 23 | 0% |
| San Francisco Ballet | 40 | 2 | 31 | 1 | 71 | 2.82% |
| Washington Ballet | 16 | 2 | 12 | 3 | 28 | 7.14% |
| **Total** | **352** | **16** | **287** | **23** | **629** | |

*1 Black man guest dancer

†1 Black man and one Black woman apprentice dancer

Note: These data only consider Corps de ballet, Soloist and Principal dancers. Apprentice and retired dancers are not included in these figures.

Note: The numbers shown on the chart, I have identified and confirmed by each company's website and also confirmed via personal communication with companies.

Note: I do not include Dance Theatre of Harlem –a predominantly Black classical ballet company because 1, They are not listed as a major company, which may have racial implications and 2. Because they are an anomaly and would skew the data.

The experiences of Black women in classical ballet have been neglected and undertheorized in the sociological literature on work and occupational inequalities, discrimination, culture, embodiment, and emotions. This research demonstrates how the intersections of race, gender and class shape aesthetic and emotional labor within the service economy. This paper addresses both forms of labor intersectionally, while also providing a case study that illustrates that emotional and aesthetic labor are more intertwined than they are often presented in empirical case studies documenting each.

**Interviewing The Cast**

To understand the experiences of Black ballet dancers, I interviewed three cohorts of Black women. Participants included 20 Black female ballet dancers who were currently employed or retired professional dancer; 25 Black women who, like me, practiced ballet (for at least 5 years intensely, but did not dance professionally. I think their stories add to the experiences of Black women who dance professionally as well as has given me a better understanding of gatekeeping and discrimination within ballet. Finally, I also interviewed 8 Black men who are current or retired professional ballet dancers. I interviewed men to get a comparison to Black women in understanding the racialized and gendered experiences of Black ballet dancers.

In addition to this, I also conducted 50 surveys. This allowed me to collect some of the demographic information from participants, provide some help with recruiting for the study, and finally also helped me reach dancers not comfortable being interviewed. I discuss gaining access to this elite population, my positionality, and the reasoning for using predominantly real names throughout the study and the limitations.

These interviews help expose how ballet is a microcosm of racism and discrimination in which reflects U.S. society more generally. In this paper, I examine Black women's experiences in the most elite ballet companies in the United States. Their experiences advance key debates in the sociology of work and occupations, gender, culture, emotions and embodiment and critical race scholarship. I examine the ways that Black dancers negotiate two forms of labor that have typically been theorized separately: *emotional* and *aesthetic* labor. Similar to Entwistle and Wissinger (2006), I demonstrate how aesthetic workers, in this case Black women in ballet, are more than just an aesthetic surface; they

produce a racialized *self, identity,* and *personality* that make their occupation *both* physical *and* emotional. Building on Entwistle and Wissinger's suggestion, I show how the aesthetic labor that Black women endure in ballet cannot be fully understood without understanding the emotional labor that accompanies it; similarly, a complete analysis of the emotional labor they tolerate requires understanding the embodied consequences of this tolerance. This challenges the ways aesthetic labor was initially theorized and builds on a great deal of work that has made use of these concepts to study workplace inequality.

**"The White Swan" Cultural Aesthetics**

Ballet has historically been known to be a predominantly White, elite activity since it was first created in Italy during the late $14^{th}$ early $15^{th}$ Centuries. During this time, ballet was strictly for the royal courts, and, from the beginning, Black dancers were excluded from ballet. Also, during this time, ballet was different from the ballet we see today; it was considered a formal more cotillion style dance. In the nineteenth century, ballet continued its elitism. Ballet transformed into the ballet that we see today, with the royal courtiers being in the ballet audience and the 5 basic ballet positions, that are the core of ballet today, were created and codified. This high cultural activity continues into the twentieth century. For some upper-class Black people, in the United States, they embraced ballet as a form of upward mobility (Jackson 2019). W.E.B. Du Bois sponsored a Black ballet school in 1919 as he laid out his criteria for art i.e., "Negro in Art" (Jackson 2019) which aligns with the Harlem Renaissance. Du Bois idea of the "Talented Tenth" included the arts in which he wanted the Black elite class to have an

understanding of "cultured aristocracy" (Du Bois 1926:359) and for Black voices to be delivered through public expression of art (Watts 2001: 182). However, aside from class, whiteness and white privilege still created a barrier for Black people to fully attain access and only so much capital within creative industries such as ballet. Literature surrounding whiteness in politics (Avila and Rose 2009) and professional sports (Newman 2007) examines the racialized privilege and racialized discrimination within various instructions.

*Capital and Elite Capital*

Pierre Bourdieu theorized several forms of capital including social capital and cultural capital which are closely related to one's social positions. Bourdieu's concept of social capital focuses primarily on conflict and power hierarchies and functions when discussing who has accessibility to ballet and Bourdieu's work examines social positions and relations within the division of economic, cultural, and social resources to help represent symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1989). Bourdieu examines how social positions are defined by location within social space and that space can be made up of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic properties (Bourdieu 1989). For Bourdieu, social capital is a resource that relates to social networks within a group, such as gaining access to instruction in ballet. He argues that "The volume of social capital possessed by a given agent ... depends on the size of the network of connections that he can effectively mobilize" (Bourdieu 1984). Bourdieu is explaining that the quality that is produced by the totality of the relationships between actors, rather than merely a common 'quality' of the group (Bourdieu 1984). He is stating that the membership within groups, and involvement in the social networks, are developing within the social relations that are

arising from the membership and can be utilized in efforts to improve the social position of the actors in and of different fields.

Bourdieu's analyzes the role of cultural capital in the accumulation of power dynamic amongst the elites to monopolize spaces. With ballet being categorized as high capital, it works within the space of social positions (Bourdieu 1984:122-123). With this connection of economic and social power, there is often a tradition that is closely tied to upper middle class and elite culture –which is a way of maintaining and justifying exclusion and legitimizing their economic privilege (Khan 2011). These social places also create an insider/outsider symbolism (Dangschat 2009). This creative space that has been monopolized by white elite people. The gatekeepers of ballet understand the racial hierarchies and have restricted access to ballet as a position. Therefore, Black dancers in this study narrated the barriers that they encountered in terms of the unequal distribution of economic and cultural capital to enter the industry however, the power of whiteness limits how much space they have within the industry. Cultural capital allows space for exploring the intersectionality of race, particularly examining whiteness and white privilege within culture.

The scholarship of race and culture is very limited especially when discussing creative spaces. Scholars such as Mary Pattillo-McCoy's *Black Picket Fences* (1999) have highlighted race and culture when discussing the Black middle class focusing on social and cultural capital. Cassi Pittman Claytor discusses consumer experiences of Black-middle class individuals. Gillian Gualtieri (2021) challenges elite cultural fields by examining how evaluative processes are racialized through restaurant reviews reinforces racial inequalities between ethnic and non-ethnic restaurants by affecting the

perceived value of restaurants. Also, Bonilla-Silva (1996) bridges Bourdieu's examination of social space and symbolic power through a racialized lens with the concept of *racialized social systems*. These racialized social systems create racialized categories within economic, political, social, and ideological realms within society. While looking at Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and Bonilla-Silva's racialized social systems, it demonstrates the power dynamics amongst the elite and the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence. It also provides a specific race with greater access and creates physical and social boundaries between other racially marginalized groups (Bonilla-Silva 1996). Through systematic racism and racialized hierarchy these distinct groups and cultural narratives of whiteness and elitism become the norm (Banks 2010; McIntosh 2001). It is "the power to constitute and to impose as universal and universally applicable within a given 'nation' that is, within the boundaries of a given territory, a common set of coercive norms" (Bourdieu 1993). The elite has the power to decide what is considered high culture and what is not, and they try to maintain their elitism by discriminating against anyone that does not fit into their "elite" culture. Since ballet has maintained this elite culture by having Black women in ballet, it disrupts this exclusive, White elite culture. Bourdieu describes this as a *schemata of classification*, a symbolic language that reflects the social reality and allows the people in control the ability to continue to dictate certain highbrow spaces and social positions.

White privilege and culture are intertwined in ballet. White privilege presents a form of exclusion through Eurocentric ideals of beauty and racialized capital that allows ballet to maintain its elitist, White space. Cultural capital as a power tool of social and cultural exclusion has the ability to frame the cultural experience of ballet as a racialized

experience of whiteness and white privilege (Blackwood and Purcell 2014: 242). Therefore, ballet, as many other creative industries, contains the power to control who gains access into these spaces through gatekeepers.

Sociological research on racial bias and cultural exclusion has neglected ballet. In her study of elite law firms Lauren Rivera (2012) examines cultural markers in hiring and recruitment. Rivera examines the role class and race play within hiring for jobs and how cultural similarities and high cultural status play a role when getting hired and attaining access within professional spaces (2012). By remaining within this cultural proximity to oneself, whiteness and elitisms reinforces demographic inequality (Childress and Nault 2019). Employers and curators, at art museums, play the role of gatekeepers as ballet teachers, choreographers, ballet masters and mistresses and even donors and board members play the role of gatekeepers in ballet (Blackwood and Purcell 2014). Gatekeepers choose who to hire, which artist to showcase and which objects to exhibit and their power influences who has access and who does not (Alexander 1996:10, Blackwood, and Purcell 2014: 239) and similarly to the fashion industry, gatekeepers' choices and Eurocentric ideals of importance tend to disadvantage and exclude Black people (Newman 2017). Historically, Black dancers were not allowed to join any dance school or ballet company they would like or within the area. Which is why W.E.B. Du Bois sponsored a Black ballet school in 1919 as he laid out his criteria for art i.e., "Negro in Art" (Jackson 2019) which aligns with the Harlem Renaissance. Du Bois idea of the "Talented Tenth" included the arts in which he wanted the Black elite class to have an understanding of "cultured aristocracy" (Du Bois 1926:359) and for Black voices to be delivered through public expression of art (Watts 2001: 182). However, aside from class,

whiteness and white privilege still created a barrier for Black people to fully attain access and only so much capital within creative industries such as ballet.

Given that ballet favors the idea of *tradition,* this generates a challenge for Black dancers. As an established highbrow industry, such as classical symphonies and ballet, try and maintain tradition as part of the cannon, this places gatekeepers in a position of simultaneously trying to maintain tradition and trying to reinvent tradition to be more inclusive and more cultural omnivores. My findings show examples of how some Black dancers experience gatekeepers that challenge the tradition and move towards cultural omnivorousness (Lena 2019) by providing opportunities and inclusive spaces for them. Other Black dancers, experience gatekeepers that tried to discourage and exclude them in order to maintain the tradition of ballet being a predominantly white elite industry. By neglecting tradition and race in the discussion of culture and creative industries, the scholarship is not providing a holistic and intersectional view of the industry. It is also not capturing change that is taking place due to the influence of popular culture. It is then maintaining a White lens in which values whiteness and neglects nonwhite creatives' experiences. This article will contribute to the gap between race, culture, and creative industries by providing an intersectional lens of race and gender to address capital, gatekeeping, tradition, and the experiences of Black creatives. By addressing cultural capital and gatekeeping from an intersectional lens, we can better understand how it is racialized. We can more specifically examine the role of whiteness and how it effects the experiences of Black people within elite cultural spaces which very few cultural scholars have previously done (Banks 2010).

**Black In White Cultural Spaces**

In 1992, bell hooks wrote in a review about artist Jean Michel Basquiat in his posthumous retrospective at the Whitney Museum,

> "Even when Basquiat can be placed stylistically in the exclusive, White male art club that denies entry to most Black artist, his subject matter –his content –always separates him once again, and defamiliarizes him."

Similarly, Black women, who make it as professional ballet dancers, are viewed in similar way. Black women are constantly being separated and marginalized despite existing in such an exclusive environment. Both Aesha and Lauren comment on the constant perception of Black women. Lauren states,

> It's just a perception; it's a stupid perception that they have to deal with—it's about what people think and how Black people can't be soft and admirable.

Aesha makes a similar, more extended statement,

> You know that we are more than an image on a screen that you see us always depicted in a negative light and I thought what better way than to use my art to show a soft side that society told me that I didn't or couldn't have It's such an opposite of what the media and society portrays us as. A classical ballerina, you know, a fairy, an angel, a princess I was like this is exactly how I want people to see me. Exactly. That's really how I felt, and, like all women, Black women can be multifaceted, and we have our anger, our rage just like *every* woman right. But unfortunately, we are always pushed into that [anger as] becoming who we are and that's not only who we are. We are sensitive, we are caring, we cry, and we are vulnerable, and we are all of these things and I wanted to push that heavily. So, it was very important to me to always maintain this classical image and this classical presence because that was exactly what they [society] didn't expect to happen. Right? They don't expect that. They expected me to be more *exotic* and whatever it is of that image that they have so yes, I always wanted to push that classical image for exactly that reason to debunk what you think classical is and what you think and who you think classical can be and whatever it is for you that's classical. And so that ties back into why I did ballet and why it's been so important to me till this day to continue to maintain the image of classy and sophisticated.

While understanding the racialized, classed, and gendered history of ballet, and unpacking ballet's connection to 'tradition' in addition to understanding the controlling

images and stigmas associated with Black women, I began to analyze the collection of microaggressions, symbolic interactions and discriminations that build up within this predominately white creative industry. I examine how each obstacle signifies a block of classed and racial exclusivity that builds up and creates this wall of exclusion that is typically at the expense of Black people.

Through a Black feminist lens, this research examines whiteness, elitism, inequality, and embodiment within creative industries. By examining the experiences of Black women in ballet, this research deconstructs racism and discrimination while capturing an understanding of how disparities in creative or "desired" workspaces are maintained and reproduced. This research addresses how whiteness and Eurocentric ideologies perpetuate racialized stigmas and controlling images that homogenize Black people and is then used to exclude them from these elite cultural workspaces.

My participants described their experiences of emotional and aesthetic labor as overlapping and entangled in ways that did not precisely fit existing models and work. This caused me to examine the theories in more depth and led me to question the extent to which emotional and aesthetic labor could be analytically separated or not. My findings allow me to recognize that coding emotional and aesthetic labor separately would not work for this particular population. And understanding this overlapping helped me to better understand how their experiences were framed by the intersections of gender and race in important ways. I demonstrate how emotional and aesthetic labor are intertwined to demonstrate how emotional and aesthetic labor may work separately for some populations but for populations similar to my participants, they need to be addressed as symbiotic.

I document how Black women face discrimination and marginalization while trying to navigate how they can perform aesthetic labor and the emotional within these White cultural spaces/occupations. I show how controlling images shape the roles that Black women are given despite the fact that they are also challenge the controlling image by persisting in ballet. Subsequently, I provide examples of emotional and aesthetic labor in which I demonstrate two related issues: 1) emotional and aesthetic labor are not as easy to separate as existing research implies, and 2) how Black professionals within predominantly White workspaces experience marginalization and discrimination.

**Ballet And Sociology**

Over the course of COVID-19, Black Lives Matter protest and the transition out of the Trump Presidency era, I was still interviewing and collecting data, and during this time, a new generation of Black ballerinas emerged. These eras of ballerinas challenge old traditions and mindsets, within ballet, and become more vocal in discussing the exclusivity of ballet. This created variety of experiences and mindsets and challenging opinions within my interview data. This new era of Black ballerinas utilizes social media and social movements, and this has allowed Black ballet dancers the ability to connect and support one another and build platforms and alliances in which they were able to call out major ballet companies and demand more inclusivity.

Sociology examines social problems and issues, social connections with one another and aspects of culture within everyday life and through ballet, we see how social issues that are taking place within society affect the everyday lives of ballet dancers and their experiences as well. We are currently capturing how cultures are changing and being challenged in society as a whole, but my particular focus is how it is shifting within

ballet. Here I examine how ballet reproduces racism and patriarchal ideologies within the industry. In doing so, I examine Black ballet dancers and the influence of cultural norms of race and gender through an intersectional lens and expose how integral looks and aesthetics are to cultural spaces and occupations. Now is the time to examine ballet from a sociological lens in order to understand and capture this exclusively elite 'safe-haven' being called to change and become more inclusive. We are witnessing how social issues and social inequalities are now being addressed within elite cultural spaces and witnessing how inclusivity is being navigated and how elites are navigating these changes. This dissertation is an invitation to come behind the curtain and discover the concealed process in the making of a ballet dancer, and more generally, a high cultural space, for as Goffman noted (1959), the vital secrets of a show are visible backstage.

---

[1]Aesha was that the only Black dancer in the company between 1996-2003.

[2] African culture has always had a significant role in shaping American culture. Even American style ballet, which was created by George Balanchine in the 1930's, had some influence of Africanist presence (Gottschild 1996, 59). "The groundedness and rhythmic sense that he [Balanchine] inherited from the Georgian (Russian) folk dance tradition was the open door that allowed him to embrace the Africanist rhythmic landscape of his adopted homeland. With talent and initiative, he was able to merge those elements from two cultures" (Gottschild 1996, 63). Balanchine would interact with Black people and attend their jazz clubs and plays to get influence for his style of dance.

[3] The origin of ballet lies in the court entertainments of the Italian Renaissance, in the late 14th early 15th century however, ballet as we know it today formed in the late 16th century where the production of the first wave of French court ballets was created and by the 19th century, during the Romantic era, many classical ballets were saved i.e., Swan Lake, Giselle and La Sylphide, and are still as popular and performed today (Wulff 2008).

[4] Many professional ballet dancers start at the young age of 3 or 4 (there are of course exceptions, e.g., Misty Copeland, Calvin Royal III, etc.). If the dancer's teachers see protentional in them they will advise them to audition for a summer intensive. Summer intensives are ballet camps that range between 3-6 weeks in which dancers will have the opportunity to intensely train with instructors from major ballet companies and if chosen they will be invited to dance at the school and then asked to join the company.

# CHAPTER 2

## ACT 1: BALLET IS [WHITE] WOMAN

Choreographer George Balanchine famously stated that, “Ballet is woman” and although he didn’t specify what kind of woman, in this statement, he certainly specified it in his descriptions and feelings towards the *ideal* ballerina. Balanchine believed that a ballerina should be supernatural, by being extremely thin, having very low to no body fat, “long,” “lean,” with long legs, a short torso, and a small head (Mitchell 1987, Gottschild 1996) to the point of looking prepubescent, mythical, and overall unattainable –which is pretty similar to dominant Western standards of beauty and attractiveness (Mears 2011)[46]. He also believed that a ballerina’s skin should be the color of a “freshly peeled apple” (Picart 2011) and for years, he would not admit a woman into the company who deviated from that ideal pale skin color[46]. This standard of the ideal ballerina ‘look’ that George Balanchine praised is still followed today.

### Tiny Pretty Things: The Ballerina Look

Lynn Garafola (1985) contextualized the shift and focus from men to women regarding ballet in the nineteenth century and its evolution of the ideal ballerina. Garafola argues:

“More than any other era in the history of ballet, the nineteenth century belongs to the ballerina. She haunts its lithographs and paintings, an ethereal creature touched with the charm of another age. Yet, even when she turned into the fast, leggy ballerina of modern times, her ideology survived… it has yet to rid its aesthetic of yesterday’s cult of the eternal feminine” (1985).

Again, the ideal ballerina became the focus; even Edgar Degas –who is notorious for creating pastel and charcoal paintings of ballerinas created over 1500 pieces of solely White, thin women in bell shape tutus doing what he describes as "a very demanding job." The paintings of the ballerinas captured the Romantic era of ballet (Laurens 2017). These balletic looks are an example of cultural product, and the aesthetic is subjective to the employers and can fluctuate in value (Entwistle 2002).

While discussing the ballerina look, we must first explore the term "look' and how it is classified and understood and contextualized. Ashley Mears explains the term 'look' and how the 'look' seemingly refers to a fixed set of physical attributes, such as how a person actually looks (Mears 2011; 6). This look is a form of bodily capital (Wacquant 2004) which ballet dancers sell to the directors, choreographers, ballet masters and mistresses and audience. This look, similar to models, projects an exceptionally difficult and unrealistic standard (Mears 2011) but is still very subjective and catered towards ballerinas; models also have a similar but still particular *look* that is catered to them specifically. As Mears states,

> Looks are a type of commodity circulating in what sociologist call the "creative" economy, also called the "aesthetic" and "cultural" economy. The cultural economy includes those sectors that cater to consumer demands for ornamentation, amusement, self-affirmation, and social display. Products coming out of the cultural economy are inscribed with high levels of aesthetic or semiotic content (Currid 2007; Entwistle 2002) in conscious attempts to generate desire from them among consumers. They provide social status and identity over and above their utility functions… (2011;7).

Ballerinas are not just required to have a particular appearance, but they are also required to dance with a particular musicality and emotion. This is what makes a ballet dancer good for a particular company. However, the appearance plays a role in first getting you

into the door and keeping you in the company[46]. One of my participants, Jenna briefly describes the balletic look and how she views her own body in comparison to the ideal balletic look. She states,

> I'm expected to look, you know. Kind of like prepubescent, you know, in a way we're not like other people, but that was just like how we were, and I fit that look until college, where I struggled to maintain that look, and so I struggled with seeing myself every single day, like in the mirror more so than when I was in high school because my body was consistently changing. I don't know. I, I wanted to look a certain type of way. And that affected, how teachers would like talk to me. Like, I remember I was at a point where I was like really rushing around in my life, like I didn't really have a whole lot of time to eat and take care of myself. And I was kind of doing a whole bunch of things that I could have easily eliminated things to make more time to take care of myself. But I didn't. And I remember I was really thin to the point where I felt like I was at my skinniest and it wasn't necessarily healthy either. And people would ask me, "Are you okay?" "What's going on?" And I had a teacher who came up to me during class and she was like, "You look great. But I just want to make sure that you're okay, that you're taking care of yourself." Which like, partially to me, was good of her to ask. But then it also made me like, so conscious of, like, whoa, people can notice that my body's changing and then the rest of the class I got like more compliments than I have ever had before, you know, so it's a little bit mind boggling to go through. But then later that year and like into the pandemic, I kind of learned to embrace some things that I've kind of been affected by due to ballet and how I look.

Jenna explained how the ballet look is not universal in comparison to how everyday people are required to look. She describes how she started to struggle maintaining this demanding look as she got older. She even acknowledges her teacher for checking on her which surprised her because in the same breath, she then praises her, as did others, for maintaining this unrealistic and not the healthiest look. Similarly, Llanchie (Aminah)[46] describes a point in her career where she felt that she needed to lose more weight because she was not being chosen for principal roles even though she felt like she was talented enough. She states,

> It was disheartening to me because every ballet that came up, any new ballet, I was never given the first prima ballerina roles. I was never even told to understudy that role. I was given the second ballerina role but to me, I should have gotten the first. With my talent, I should have been[46]…But that bothered me, and I felt like maybe I don't look good enough. So I went down the street, from the building and there was a store, run by a Muslim, and in the front of the store, it had a book that says, *How to Eat to Live*, so I don't know why but I bought the book and I started following the book and lost 10 pounds in about a week or something like that (laughs) and so all of a sudden, I was getting attention but it also got to the point where Arthur Mitchell started worrying about me. He said, "you know, you have to eat" (laughs) and I said, "I'm eating" (laughs) and so it was an obvious difference and the more I danced I got better, felt better, and got roles.

Both Jenna and Llanchie (Aminah) discuss how they lost weight and the way people reacted towards their weight loss. They described being perceived in a more approving and encouraging way despite how they actually felt and how the way they even lost the weight. It is also worth noting how both of their teachers checked in on them to make sure that they were okay, even though they still were praising their weight loss and not actually knowing the cause or process of the weight loss. This is only one aspect in which ballet dancers try to fit into the ballet aesthetic.

Throughout this chapter, I have used the art world approach to peel back layers of labor and conventions that constitute the *ballerina look*. Immediately behind the image are the ballet dancers and their bodily and emotional craft. Behind the dancer is the matchmaking ballet master/mistress, wheeling and dealing in bodily and social capital exchanges. Behind the ballet master/mistress, finally, is the artistic director, and patrons, that precarious tastemaker scrambling for authority to recognize the ballerina look. Behind them all are social structural patterns of inequality that constrain individual action. Cultural ideals of feminine and masculine difference along race and class lines

limit the field of possibilities of the look. Therefore, there are layers to the ballet world and who gets access into it.

This chapter traces the layers and the role of social structural forces in ballet by their look. To better understand these structures and how they are exclusive, racialized, gendered, and classed, I will describe the aesthetic requirements to becoming and maintaining one's position as a ballet dancer. I explain how ballet masters/mistresses in the ballet industry weigh their decisions on aesthetics and racial exclusion. I describe the racialized and gendered ballerina body and the deficits that Black women's bodies experience because of racialized stigmas and controlling images. The stigmas associated with Black women homogenize them and are used to discriminate against them and marginalize them. However, Black women express how they navigate these obstacles and the emotional and aesthetic labor they use to do it.

**The Black Dancing Body**

Ballet, which upholds the White, male aristocratic values of its roots, has not been very accessible to Black people, although the demand for change is now starting to take place. There is very little documentation in ballet history conversation concerning Black people's involvement in ballet. However, there is a history in which Black people have been involved historically since the inception of American ballet as well as the establishment of Black ballet companies and schools. (Adair, 1992:167). As Golden states,

> Ballet historically constructs beauty as slender, dainty "white" beauty, black ballerinas were forced to dance as troupes of African primitivism rather than

alongside white ballerinas in traditional costumes with traditional choreography (2018: 5).

The ballet industry created a racialized myth in order to justify the lack of Black people within the ballet industry. Many dancers I have interviewed stated that there are people within the ballet industry that believe Black dancers cannot afford to participate in ballet. These racialized assumptions and its historical exclusion do not hold; however, it does remain significant as a mixture of cultural and organizational boundaries, within creative spaces, complicating basic racism. Consequently, Black women in ballet face forms of racialized and gendered aesthetic requirements that they ultimately cannot fulfill or blatantly do not compliment them aesthetically and respectfully[46].

Afrocentric theory also shapes racial stigmas of a Black dancer's body. Gottschild (2003), addresses racial identities and racial embodiment by deconstructing historical context within the racial stigmas that are attached to specific parts of the body i.e., 'Feet', 'Butt', 'Skin/Hair' all in which embody the Afrocentric theory. Afrocentric theory redefines and confronts the marginalization of hegemonic, racist beauty standards towards Black women and provides agency through collective consciousness (Patton 2006 Asante 1998). Gottschild addresses Afrocentric features as being minsterlized (stereotypical expressions) into the 'coon' construct" and are used as a constant reminder as to why Black people do not have the right 'body type' for ballet. However, explaining how "the coon body and spirit were also cool" as well as explained this concept of enculturated somatophobia[46] all challenges these stigmas.

Llanchie (Aminah) is a dancer that challenged these stigmas throughout her career to be a professional ballerina. However, her journey within the professional ballet realm was

not easy. Llanchie (Aminah) describes her experience of being a Black woman trying to navigate the ballet institution and the discrimination she got from being a Black woman and how it did not fit into the ideal ballerina aesthetic of George Balanchine. She states,

> I think I had been at the school for two years and I've seen all my classmates getting into the company and all of a sudden, you know, what was going on here. You know, I don't want to spend two years of my life here or three, four years of my life here. And Mr. Balanchine is not going to take me to the company. So, I asked the director, Diana Adams, at that time, I said to her can you ask Mr. Balanchine what is his plan for me? She went and she came back to me, and she said that after talking with him, she said, well, he said that he loves your feet, you know, but he was not ready to take a Black girl into the company right now because that would break the color line. And he was not ready to do that at the time. So, she told me, and she said she started crying and she said, don't give up, don't give up, don't stop.

Despite Arthur Mitchell –a Black male, being admitted into the company, prior to Llanchie (Aminah), Balanchine was not ready for a Black woman. This is when we see the intersections of both race and gender. In Akasha (Gloria T.) Hull's book (1982) titled, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us are Brave*, Hull centers Black women and develops Black women's scholarship as a collective. Kimberlé Crenshaw stems from this book and scholarship while coining intersectionality in which she argues, "Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender" (Crenshaw 1989: 140). Anna J. Cooper's book *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South* (1892), takes an intersectional approach to examining how systems of race, gender, and class oppression –explicitly emphasizing how Black women are simultaneously impacted by both racism and sexism and yet she is either unknown or unacknowledged (by White women, White men, or Black men). Therefore, Cooper and later Patricia Hill Collins

argue that Black women have a unique epistemological standpoint to which (1) can observe society and its oppressive systems and (2) create a methodology that signals an attempt to examine the context of Black women in a way that does not violate its basic epistemological framework (Collins 1990). This reiterates that men are typically the focus when discussing race and White women are typically viewed in terms of gender and so non-White women are “doubly” subordinated by both gender and race (Segura 1984; Foster-Carter 1987; Nakano Glen 1992) and here we see Llanchie (Aminah) providing an example in the intersections of race and gender and how it affects Black women specifically within ballet.

Due to Llanchie’s (Aminah) experience, there was discourse, of Black women being excluded from the company, that continued on as Debra entered the School of American Ballet with the idea of transitioning into the company. She states,

> At the school, they said to me that they don’t think that Balanchine was going to take me into the company because you’re… I mean he’s just not going to want a Black dancer in the corp de ballet.

Although this has been the experience for previous dancers Llanchie (Aminah)[46], Debra had a different outcome as by this time. At this point, Balanchine was ready to have a Black woman in the company.

Discourse around Black people and their bodies have been racialized as monolithic and through stereotypes and racialized myths, they create ideologies in which Black people’s bodies do not fit the required “look” for ballet[46]. Camyron addresses this ideology that Black dancers experience and how she feels indifferent when sharing her actual experience within ballet. She states,

> I think when you have a black dancer, you think that we're all going through the same traumatic experiences and that everyone is having a hard time and hating it. I think this is like the Misty Copeland syndrome. Like she's at the forefront, so when many people want to think of a black dancer, they think of her. They think of like what she's gone through. And it's like every dancer is so unique and like what we do, like we place like dancers and like this whole [Black] community in this one story…And I'm like, that's like not my story. And it's like some of us didn't have so many traumatic experiences. Like, I think for me sometimes I find it hard when people ask me, what my story is, [because] I'm like I honestly had a wonderful time training because I have the ballet body. But if you ask someone else, they're like, I had a hard time. But I think, like, it's just so difficult to be just placed in this one mold of, like, how it's supposed to be [because of being a Black dancer].

Camyron shares a unique perspective in that she is addressing the monolithic ideology that Black dancers are placed in, and it is important to address this because this monolithic ideology/stereotype allows and creates discrimination for a whole race. Not only does Camyron share that she does have the ideal ballet body type, for ballet, but she also shares that she has enjoyed her experience in ballet and did not have a traumatic experience. This creates a greater dynamic in understanding the Black experience in ballet. It is not that *all* Black people have the same body type or don't have any cultural or economic support, it is that *all* Black dancers are being perceived that way and so they are experiencing similar discourses and stigmas, despite fitting the stereotype, in which displays and contributes to the racism within this space. Noni shares this as she states,

> Yeah, so I'm like really tall, really thin and have long limbs. So, I guess I do conform to the typical ballet body. But, you know, I'm still black, so I have like a little bit of curves, a little bit. But yeah, I think I do conform to the typical ballet body. And I didn't really realize that is rooted in whiteness, so it's like, you know, a lot of ballet dancers are white and that's a type of body that they have. But, you know, black people, our bodies are really, really different. They come in different shapes, sizes, and things like that.

Noni also addresses having the ideal body type but acknowledges how that does not matter because she is Black and understands the racial exclusivity that is associated with body type and aesthetic look within ballet. It also calls to question the standard of Black beauty. Black women cannot just fit the general standards they have to be exceptionally beautiful, a lighter[46] color or have Eurocentric features in order to be considered.

This aligns with the purpose of Blackface performers and caricatures post-Civil War into the 20th century and the film Birth of a Nation. These stereotypes are created on the bases of power and control and by generalizing a racial group, it maintains White supremacy and discrimination. Camyron, is not the only one who addresses the monolithic approach and discourse around Black dancers in ballet. Alanah makes a similar comment,

> So, they talk to us all the same without again asking or giving us the benefit of the doubt. And that's why we have these similar experiences. It's not we really do because we're not the same. So, like, again, it's that whole thing. Like, some people do have the right body. Some people don't. Some people have money. Some people don't like saying, well, there are some white people out there that ain't got money for ballet.

Alanah, reiterates the point previously made of Black people's experiences being homogenized and generalized opposed to being humanized and having their individual stories acknowledged and validated. The monolithic stereotypes towards Black women were not solely about their body image, it was also about economic capital as well.

*The Range of Cultural and Economic Capital in Ballet*

The narrative that Black people cannot financially afford to participate in ballet, has been validated and dated, within the ballet institution, since ballet was officially established within the United States in the 1900s. These perceived stereotypes and notions about Black people in ballet has been created as another way to try and exclude

Black women from the ballet institution. It has perpetuated an ideology that ballet is not the space for Black people –whether they are participating or spectating.

Capital takes several forms when discussing elite cultural spaces like ballet. Each of these forms stem from social relationships and thus are understood as social constructs. *Economic capital* refers to financial resources –specifically money. *Symbolic capital* includes the meaning that individuals, groups, organizations, and institutions attribute based on honor, prestige, recognition, any abstract social entity, or that may have a material consequence. *Cultural capital* refers to a variety of socially meaningful status markers –such as consumer taste, leisure activities, fashion or art sense, speech etc. *Social capital* refers to the relationships and networks that can affect one's opportunities (Bourdieu 1984). Bodily capital refers to a matter of idiosyncratic tastes and personal evaluations of one's physical beauty (Mears 2011). All five types of capital remain interlocked within the ballet industry.

In the twenty-first century, ballet continued its elitism. Through the cost of attire and cost of classes and summer intensives, ballet not only perpetuates classed inequalities but also perpetuates racial barriers formed by racist ideologies and stigmas. A combination of White privilege and economic capital afford white dancers the advantage and access to ballet while Black dancers (wealthy or not) are then excluded from the space. Black dancers are often stigmatized as not being able to afford or have the economic capital to participate within ballet (Carmen 2014). This stigma has not only homogenized Black people but has also contributed to beliefs and perceptions that perpetuate the ideology that Black people do not belong in ballet. Table 2.1 shows that 35 out of the 50 dancers surveyed have their parents either partially or fully finance their ballet expenses. The rest

or the participants had assistance such as scholarships –which made up about 25 out of the 50 that were either on partial or full scholarship and 6 out of 50 on either full or partial work study. Given that a higher percentage of my participants are financially supported by their parents challenges the stigma that Black people do not have parents or guardians that can afford to have their children in ballet.

**Table 2.1: Frequency and Proportion of Black Women Dancers Financial Support**

| | Number of Black Women Dancers | Proportion of Black Women Dancers |
|---|---|---|
| Parents | 20 | 40% |
| Scholarship | 13 | 26% |
| Work Study | 3 | 6% |
| Parents and Scholarships | 12 | 24% |
| Parents and Work Study | 3 | 6% |
| Scholarship and Work Study | 0 | 0% |

The majority of my participants have some kind of economic capital to participate in ballet. Gabrielle states when discussing her support system,

> My mom is awesome. She's a single parent too so, she's definitely a great support system and I know she's spent *A LOT* of money to get me to where I am.

Gabrielle explains that she came from a single parent household and her mother still made it a priority to financially support Gabrielle (as well as her older sister) through their ballet training. These numbers and narratives combat the stigma that Black people cannot afford to do ballet and that for many, their parents do have the economic capital to finance their children's ballet training. Again, while discussing an activity such as ballet, it is important to reiterate that it is an expensive high cultural activity and there are economic inequalities across different races. Pointe shoes alone range between $80-$130 depending on the pointe shoe's style and brand and then there are other fees such as

leotards, ballet skirts, tights, classes, summer intensives, and miscellaneous fees (see e.g., pbt.org)[46]. Ballet is an activity that is designed for the elite class regardless of race; however, through racialized stereotypes and myths, it becomes viewed as a classed and raced problem particularly for Black dancers.

As we see, *all* Black people do not have the same experiences financially and culturally. As dancer Rachael Parini states in an interview with Dance Magazine,

> "You don't know someone's story until you ask them. Each of *our* experiences is different –we're not all the same just because we are Black" (Parini in Salvatto's article 2021).

For some dancers their parents may have the money and not the cultural capital to justify the expense of ballet. For other parents, they may have capital but not the financial means, and for other dancers their parents have both the financial means and the capital, and some have neither. This is another example of the complexities that Black dancers' experiences and so they are challenging the stigma that *all* Black dancers cannot afford or have access to ballet.

While understanding how Black dancers find various ways in attaining economic capital for ballet, the concepts of social and cultural capital now become a focus when discussing Black dancers' ability to attain access into ballet. For many of my participants, they would discuss their parents either obtaining cultural capital or economic capital with more of an emphasis on cultural capital as the reason for gaining access into ballet. One of my participants, Andrea shared,

> I happened to have a mother, who was very different growing up. She was into art and poetry and music and this and that. My mother is very artistic, so she was like, "Ballet!" you know what I mean? But how many of our children who are not born into these households, where mommy and daddy are making a good income can introduce their children to that? It's also a class thing.

Andrea shared her mother's cultural interest in the arts and understanding of its capital and what Andrea could gain from being involved in ballet. Aside from the cultural understanding, Andrea stated that her mother has the economic capital to invest in Andrea's participation in ballet. Alicia also shares the cultural interest in the arts that her mother –a professor at Howard University shares as she states,

> My mom is a Black woman who didn't have dance training but she's like a Renaissance woman –she has a lot of education in the arts and obviously the commercial world, with modeling, and she just has a lot of broad passions, so it wasn't a stretch for her to put me in dance class.

Both Andrea and Alicia share how their mothers are very into art and culture and they both had a high cultural understanding of the cultural significance behind having a daughter in ballet. The idea of ballet holding this high cultural capital and forms of upward mobility is not belief that solely Black people have. However, both Andrea and Alicia's mothers understood the significance of signing their daughters up. Andrea even shared that she wanted to be like her brothers and play football and basketball outside and her mother said, "No, you want to go to ballet." Andrea's mother felt that ballet was worth the investment. While she viewed ballet as gendered towards her daughter specifically because she wanted to "teach her how to be a lady and not a tomboy," and so, she was able to place Andrea in the direction to attain the necessary tools to be successful in ballet. Also, the gendered idea of ballet "teaching her daughter how to be a lady" also plays into beauty capital and politics, desirability, and upward mobility. For Alicia, her mom was already involved within the arts and saw that in her daughter at an early age and felt that it was worth the investment. Both Alicia and Andrea acknowledge the cultural capital that their mothers have and the cultural capital that they then have gained from her mothers' while acknowledging that everyone does not have that same

experience. In this case, both Andrea and Alicia's mothers attained cultural and economic capital as Andrea makes it clear, they understood that even if financially people may be able to afford it, parents may not always understand how investing in ballet creates a cultural value that is just as important. Particularly Black parents who may be hesitant to invest because of their understanding of ballet as a predominately White space and its exclusivity.

In Shamus Khan's book *Privilege* (2011), the author discusses how attending a school like St. Paul's is not just about the school having a more rigorous curriculum, it is about embodying privilege –learning and maintaining the social and cultural capital in which allows people to feel comfortable and at ease amongst highbrow activities and environments. For some Black parents, they may have the financial means to place their children in a highbrow activity such as ballet, but they may not think it is worth it or understand how these cultural activities allow their children to gain a cultural capital that is tied to the elite. Andrea shares this as she acknowledges that for some people, particularly Black parents, they may have the money to afford to place their children in ballet, but they may not understand the investment culturally. She states,

> Now most African Americans, who are middle to upper middle class, they're looking at the $30,000 they would pay for a ballet school tuition and think you're going to college so you can make a living not oh you can become a professional ballet dancer. But now, Misty is shifting that dynamic a little bit. Yeah, you can be a ballerina and make money, I mean but Misty has become like this pop icon.

Again, Andrea is not only addressing how expensive ballet is but also addressing how Black parents could not justify investing in ballet because there has been a lack of representation. The lack of representation and the traditionally racialized and exclusive space of ballet makes it hard for Black parents to justify investing this money when there

is already this assumption that Black girls will not make it professionally. Hyper-visual figures, such as Misty Copeland, provide representation and allow Black dancers and parents the opportunity to see that they can become a professional ballet dancer which can change that perception. This also demonstrates the elitist and exclusive culture of ballet and how it perpetuates a particular aesthetic in order to maintain an elitist and racist representation.

*Ballet with a French Twist: Hair Politics and Cultural Aesthetics*

Ballet classes, summer intensives and pricey attire are not the only symbolic forms of exclusion and discrimination. It is also not the only way Black women are stereotyped and unitarily discriminated against. Hair is another symbolic form of exclusion that Black women experience.

While slightly surprised, but not completely, hair was always the emphasized topic while interviewing my Black women participants. Every time I brought up the topic of hair every Black woman had some kind of reaction when the topic came up. It was the golden question, almost like the topic they were waiting for. The conversation of hair triumphed any other questions when interviewing my Black women participants and I can guarantee, this topic would ignite the same reaction and in-depth conversation if I asked a random Black woman on the street, in the grocery store, at the gym (Ray 2017), in a corporate office etc. a question about her hair. As Banks (2000) states, "Black women share a collective consciousness about their hair, through it is articulated in a variety of ways" (21). Hair, particularly for Black women, is multi-dimensional. It embodies an array of complexities that accompany political and social identities and issues. Black hair is used as a marker of race, ethnicity, embodiment, and beauty (DeLongoria 2018). Hair

matters. It plays and big role in Black women's experiences –how they navigate the world and how the world perceives and addresses Black women.

Byrd and Tharps (2002) address how Black people in the United States have continuously been in a convoluted relationship with their hair since slavery. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, slaves did not have traditional styling tools and began using scarves as alternatives to hide their patchy baldness and breakage (Patton 2006, Byrd and Thraps 2002, Banks 2000). They also had to create their own styling tools and develop their own hair remedies (Byrd and Thraps 2002). Black hair and technology for Black hair began to evolve and has taken a creative personal, political, and popular stance throughout the United States to challenge the assimilationist notion of beauty and challenge perceived expectations (Patton 2006, Banks 2000). In Rooks book, *Hair Raising*, she examines how Black women have occupied the cosmetic industry in the 1990s. Rooks states that in 1992 the market for hair-care products in the United States was just over $3.9 billion, which was a 2.9 percent increase from 1991 and it is indicated that Black people spent three times more than other consumer groups on cosmetic products that was designed to straighten Black hair (1996; p.117). Black hair can be seen in assimilationist customs when it is straightened for employment and social mobility, within the workforce, because it is subscribing to White hegemonic standards of beauty. However, engaging in social mobility does not always mean assimilation or diluting ones racial/ethnic identity (Johnson and Harris 2001). Today, Black women are able to create various styles to survive the organizational norms while being true to one's racial/ethnic identity. Hair is a concept of beauty and because ballet still embodies patriarchal roles, the concept of beauty holds a significant role while addressing women in ballet.

The beauty roles that are implemented within this predominately white institution revolve around hegemonic Eurocentric ideals of beauty and the Black women in my study understood this. They understood that the ideal ballerina was not in favor of them and so they navigated and negotiated was to occupy the space, but it still affected them and played a major role in their experience. Cynthia hares how her hair was a worry for her as she states,

> My hair was a worry (laughs). Especially when I got to New York City Ballet because Balanchine loved when we did pieces with our hair out and that was my biggest nightmare. Because I did not have the same hair.

Cynthia addresses how her hair texture created a barrier for her to *fit* in and *fit* the aesthetic requirement. She also shared how that made her feel emotionally. Llanchie (Aminah) shares how she had to navigate and style her hair to *fit* the aesthetic requirement. She states,

> What they call the classical bun is parted in the middle. And it comes down and it has to cover your ears and then it goes back and forth (gesturing how the bun goes) and so on. That’s how we did our buns. So, when I decided, okay, I'm going natural. I'm going to wear an afro –which I did outside of class, but in class, you know, I had to pull it back. But how do I do the classical bun with an afro. I ended up putting hair over my ears. So just brushing my hair down and putting the extra hair like a bun. (Gesturing the process) sort of like your hair like that and pulling it under. That's how I did that. He didn’t say anything, as long as I had a classical look, then nobody said anything.

Llanchie (Aminah) was a little different from Cynthia in that she just describes how she did the best she could with her hair and as long as no one questioned it, she would do the best she could. However, it is still similar to Cynthia in that they are acknowledging that their hair does not fit the required look and for Llanchie’s (Aminah) case, she had to figure out a way to navigate it.

Jenna also shares how she has to navigate ways to style her hair so that it could fit the ideal look. She states,

> I feel like the whole reason why I used to straighten my hair as a kid, what it's like for ballet, like because that was the way that it would be able to get in the bone and it would be easy to do and like, I wouldn't have to worry about it. And then it was like another step of assimilation. Like it would be one less thing that, you know, I would stand out with. I would fit in a little bit better.

Jenna addresses how she navigates her hair in order to assimilate more and not stand out as much. Given that ballet is big on uniformity, it is important for Black women to also try and achieve these required hairstyles in order to stay within the ballet institution. It is part of the costume.

Gabi also discusses some challenges with attaining specific hairstyles required within ballet e.g., the French Twist. Aside from the ballet bun, the French twist is the other hairstyle most associated and required within ballet. While acknowledging the different experiences that everyone has when discussing hair, Gabi shares her experience,

> It’s pretty easy for me to make a bun. I will say that French twists are definitely the hardest thing. Just to keep it contained and that’s when I feel like straight hair would be a little easier like I need like 500 pins for French twists because my hair is all over the place but for the most part, I would say that it’s pretty easy for me to get it in like a classical hairstyle.

Daphne also shares her hair experience and how diverse Black people’s hair can be. She states,

> I think I had more of a hair issue. I remember one time I had this one director, and he did not say this out of malice, but he wanted to be sure that my hair could do the desired French twist look and I said yes my hair can do that, but it may look a little differently but know that my hair texture can do it and I have had other ballerinas in the room that never saw 4C hair blown out or saw it shrink and then saw it in twist. They’ve never seen the variety and diversity of what 4C hair can do so I spent a lot of time educating ballerinas in there, who were not of color, what Black hair actually is because the other Black person in there, her hair was relaxed. So, they were not sure what the natural hair was like or have never seen 4C hair and how I would come in with it one day being 2 inches long and then

> after blowing it out and it’s 6 inches long. So, educating them on that and that’s the biggest issue I had, and it wasn’t an issue it was a moment of education.

Daphne and Gabi explain the complexities of Black women’s hair and how everyone does not have the same experience, but hair is still a conversation for Black women. It is an important conversation for because it is a symbolic indicator that their hair is not the desired aesthetic within the ballet space and so they must find ways to navigate their hair to achieve the required look. TaÏs shares a similar experience as she states,

> When I was younger, I would always put my hair in a bun and straightening my hair all the time and it ruined my hair like it got so dry.

This is significant because Taïs addresses how aesthetic labor has racialized consequences in that some of the hairstyles required for the ideal balletic look actually damages Black women’s hair. The constant manipulation and tension on their hair that is required to achieve these particular looks, are not good for a lot of Black women’s hair and it is not considered and acknowledged.

Whiteness and White supremacy have created a complicated history for Black women and their hair and continues to create a complicated history. It was not until 2019, the Crown Act[46] was created to “Create a Respectful and Open World for Natural [Black] Hair” –and end hair discrimination after constant incidents of hair discrimination in schools, the military/army, occupational spaces etc. Therefore, it is important to address the role of racialization and hair politics within ballet. The balletic aesthetic is not inclusive to Black women and their hair texture and so Black women are continuously navigating ways to achieve this aesthetic, even if it meant sacrificing the health of their hair.

Black women within the ballet institution cannot properly be discussed without addressing the intersectionality of race, gender, and culture. The experiences of exclusion, marginalization and discrimination is not solely applicable to ballet; these same processes occur in other cultural fields as well[46]. The experiences of Black women in ballet, will not only combat the racialized assumptions as to why there is a lack of representation of Black dancers, but also contribute to the minimal conversation and scholarship in regard to race and culture.

**Managing Marginalization, Discrimination and Controlling Images**

In 1975, a director of a major ballet company stated "The carriage of the Black dancer is not classic. It's the position of the spine. The litany of bodily excesses and deficiencies lay at the ready to exclude the Black body from miscegenation within the White body or corps de ballet: critics rhetorically constructed and essentialized the black dancer as possessing a too-stocky bone structure, protruding buttocks, and feet that were too flat and too large" (Gaiser 2006: 272). In ballet, these racist beliefs still pervade the industry. In 2014, the executive director of American Ballet Theatre (ABT) told *Pointe Magazine*, "I've heard from the mouths of dance professionals that Black dancers categorically cannot become ballet dancers because they don't have the right body." In 2015, the *New York Daily Post* wrote, "A lot of people feel ballerinas should all be the same color," (Keivom 2015). Black bodies are racialized as not fitting the required "look" for ballet. Consequently, Black women in ballet face forms of aesthetic discrimination resulting from aesthetic labor that they ultimately cannot fulfill.

*The Balletic Line: Discrimination and Marginalization*

In 1988, McIntosh identified one facet of white privilege as the ability to "choose blemish cover or bandages in 'flesh' color and have them more or less match my [white] skin." Many of my interviewees repeatedly identified their experiences of rejection as dancers, including not being able to find proper clothing, including tights, pointe shoes, and leotards that matched their skin tone.[46] As a consequence, each invested more labor in altering clothing they could find to conform to the (white) dress code and making it work for their (Black) bodies. This labor came at a cost, involving time, energy (dying tights and leotards and coloring shoes with makeup), additional financial burdens, and emotional costs associated with confronting the question of why these required tools of the trade were not made with their bodies in mind. A Black ballet dancer interviewed in *Elle* magazine in 2017 shared: "When I saw all the shades of brown tights, it gave me the courage to try Ballet myself." My interviews attest to the constant "courage" required of Black women in ballet. Discrimination against Black women in ballet required spending more time and money experimenting with dye and makeup to fit aesthetic ideals produced, in part, to exclude their bodies. Many of my interviewees commented on the emotional labor and resilience necessary to navigate ballet's rigorous gendered and racialized aesthetic requirements.

Costumes and makeup in ballet are mundane elements of the trade. But, as McIntosh (1988) points out, White privilege operates through the mundane; mundane experiences pile up and work to justify patterned and structural forms of rejection and discrimination. For instance, pointe shoes were created in the 1820s and it was not until 2017 that a few companies started to make pointe shoes and tights for darker skinned women. Indeed, some of my interviewees were affiliated with companies working to create new options

for women with different skin tones in ballet. For instance, Daphne, an ambassador for one such company, shared: "I wear Gaynor Mindens. Gaynor Mindens has been very supportive of recognizing women of color… they are now trying to get pointe shoes that actually match our skin tone, and had it be normalized that you can have [normal to have] pointe shoes in your actual shade." Pointe shoes, leotards and tights reflect the racialized symbolic image of "the ballerina."

Many forms of exclusion such as attempting to find "flesh colored" tights, leotards and pointe shoes or being required to use lighter make up, as Janet Collins and Raven Wilkinson were, to look more European create structural and symbolic forms of discrimination that impact Black women emotionally. Llanchie (Aminah) shared with me the story of how she unknowingly became the influence behind flesh-tone tights. She shares how she would wear flesh-tone tights over her pink tights because she wanted to look slimmer. She stated,

> I started with the brown tights because it was much easier for me. It just looked so much better. I like the look of it. I did so and I kept on doing that because you could wear whatever you wanted over your tights. So, to me, the brown tights made me look thinner and it just seemed like a whole throwing of the line, you know, so I thought nothing of it until Yvette told me, you know, that started with you.

Once Arthur Mitchell saw her wearing flesh tights, he then decided to have everyone within the company wear flesh tone tights. This became an act of declaration over the art form in which it defined classicism and racial exclusion that transformed through the *ballet pink* standard.

During In the early 1800s, the Paris Opera Ballet sought to create pink tights and shoes[46], because bare legs were too risqué for Parisians to view. They decided to have dancers wear tights. The concept of *ballet pink* complimented the all-White company's

skin tone and from then on it has always been required and many people associate this blush shade of pink as *ballet pink*. However, for Llanchie (Aminah), she decided to navigate a way to wear tights that she felt complimented her body and her *balletic lines*[46] better –she just wanted to look thinner and longer i.e., trying to *fit* the aesthetic requirement. This racialized declaration transcended through the 1990s when Lauren – who became the first Black principal dancer at Houston Ballet.

Lauren as well as Precious both advocated for flesh-tone tights that complemented their skin tone within their companies. In fact, in 2018 Precious made a statement that she would no longer perform on stage wearing pink tights and would wear brown tights that complimented her skin tone. During the Black Lives Matter protect in 2020, there have been petitions for skin-tone tights to be the standard in ballet companies and ballet attire companies are now creating ballet tights as well as pointe shoes that compliment an array of skin complexions.

These symbolic interactions, through balletic attire, demonstrate racial exclusion and how Black women navigate the space. Tinelle shares how her experience was no different when she was required to wear a certain shade of makeup that did not complement her skin tone. Laughing, she stated:

> The teachers didn’t understand that with my skin tone, I couldn’t wear the red lipstick that my friend Sally is wearing. And I don’t know I guess in that sense I did feel a certain isolation.

Dancers described having different outfits and makeup because what worked for other (White) dancers did not work for them. Cynthia, a former dancer for New York City Ballet, explained:

> That was difficult because all the elastic bands [in costumes] were pink. Which I never really did anything about it when I first joined. I didn’t think much of it but

as I got more involved in my roles and being an artist, as opposed to a student, I started looking back at myself and started striving for perfection so I started pancaking [covering with skin tone makeup] my straps and stuff like that so I could look like everyone else even though I wasn't the same color. It was more so about the colors matching their skin tones and it just looked like the bodes; you didn't see the straps so, I eventually learned how to do that [camouflage the straps] for my skin tone but no one helped me with it. You just sort of do those things on your own.

She continues,

> When I was dancing Cocoa in *The Nutcracker*, the costume [was] pink. So, I asked them to change the color, but they just removed the tights, and I would wear it bare skinned, and I would put a big rhinestone on my naval (laughs)… I would just use my pancake [pad used to apply makeup] that I used for my face on my shoes…That was difficult because all the elastic bands [in costumes] were pink. Which I never really did anything about it when I first joined… As I got more involved in my roles and being an artist, as opposed to a student, I started looking back at myself and started striving for perfection so I started *pancaking* my straps and stuff like that so I could look like everyone else even though I wasn't the same color… No one helped me with it. You just sort of do those things on your own.

When it came to issues with tights and costumes, Cynthia was far from alone. Ingrid (a current dancer) shared: "I paint my pointe shoes using BLK OPI true color."

Similarly, Gabi elaborated on the challenges she faced matching her pointe shoes and how she had to navigate through trial and error. She states,

> We had to dye our own shoes at times and the tights are something that the company had for us… I eventually found like regular make up that worked for me and just stuck with that.

Jenna also shares her experience of discovering flesh tone tights and how similarly to overs, it accentuates her balletic lines which is the main purpose of ballet and the balletic look. She states,

> I didn't realize that you could change the color of your point. She was like with foundation until like college. And once I found that out I never wore pink shoes ever again because I just I don't know. They always say that like pointe shoes and tights should be like an extension of your legs. But like the reason why I feel always so disconnected and like, far away from it is because, like, they never matched my skin color. And sometimes, like, it wouldn't bother me until I got, like, a little bit older where I was kind of more realizing, like, oh, this is kind of this is kind of weird. Like, I would rather, you know, have my, like, barefoot in a shoe that's like matching with my skin color. That made me feel more like confident in my own skin, in my own dancing, instead of like I felt like I was playing a role, which was fine sometimes. But when I really wanted to feel comfortable and I really wanted to feel like an individual in my dancing, I did enjoy having my pointe shoes match my skin color.

Many of my interviewees repeatedly identified their experiences of exclusion by the obstacles they faced when looking for proper clothing, including tights, pointe shoes, and leotards that complimented their skin tone. As a consequence, not only was this a constant reminder they are unable to find flesh tone attire within a ballet attire store, but they are also reminded of the additional invested labor they have to endure by altering the clothing buy in order to conform to the (white) dress code in order to make it work for their (Black) bodies. This labor came with an additional cost, involving time, energy (dying tights and leotards and coloring shoes with makeup), additional financial burdens, and emotional costs associated with confronting the question of why these required tools of the trade were not made with their bodies in mind. Pointe shoes alone range between $80-$130 depending on the pointe shoe’s style and brand and then there are other fees such as leotards, ballet skirts, tights, classes, summer intensives, and miscellaneous fees (see e.g., pbt.org)[46].

Black dancers experience symbolic forms of discrimination through the aesthetic requirements in ballet as an industry and workplace. And while they work towards navigating ways to maintain an aesthetic that satisfies those requirements and works for

them too, this process creates additional labor that comes with attendant emotional and financial burdens.

*Controlling Images*

Controlling images are images of a subordinate group developed by a dominate group that work to justify oppression. The portrayal of Black women as stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and jezebels (video vixens) are central features of the political economy of dominance and foster Black women's oppression (Collins 1990). These controlling images exist in ballet too through the roles given to Black women and by their existence within this predominately white space, often illustrate important forms of structural and cultural discrimination and marginalization within this workplace.

Many of the Black ballerinas in this study were intimately aware of controlling images and were mindful of how they presented themselves to avoid being stereotyped. *The Nutcracker* was an emotionally charged topic for every participant interviewed in this study. The performance offers a powerful example of the racialized and gendered roles specifically for Black and Asian dancers. Indeed, there have been numerous news articles written about the racial depictions within *The Nutcracker* (e.g., Crabb 2019; Fieldstadt 2019 Fisher 2018;). Within this study alone, Aesha was a part of the sixty percent of the Black women I interviewed who were specifically assigned the role of the Arabian princess. In the ballet, the Arabian princess is portrayed as exotic and erotic wearing a bralette and the only dancer baring midriff, while also requiring her to move her body in sensual ways around the male dancer with whom she is partnered. Consistent with Collins' (2002) historicization of the Black jezebel, the critic's racist comment ("…up there looking just like Lil'Kim") discursively compares Aesha's role to a video

vixen. This illustrates one instance of how controlling images operate to discursively cast Black women as overly "exotic" or "sexualized." Since the music industry is still controlled by White elites—less likely to value and be knowledgeable of the diversity and complexity amongst Black women—Black women are routinely homogenized as "Black prostitutes" and "jezebels" (Collins 2002). Aesha understood the critic's comment to be reflective of controlling images which, for Aesha, was exactly what she has worked so hard to challenge through the images shown in her non-profit organization:

> It was so powerful to go back home and do that for my neighborhood and for them to see a woman of color, other than what they see on a screen, other than the next *video chick*, other than someone twerkin' I am just so tired of that empowerment. That's fine if that empowers you, if that's what works for you then it works but I just don't want it to be the only message and the only way that our women can feel like they can empower themselves because there is another way and that's what I want for my daughter … I want my daughter to feel empowered and I want my community to feel empowered. I want this image [the image of a Black ballerina] to keep getting pushed so when a little, young Black girl wants to become a ballerina, society already sees her as that. Society already sees the potential to be that, so she doesn't get type casted. Society has to be ready as a whole too because artistic directors and staff are only one part but people who spend money to come to the ballet have to be mentally prepared so that when they come to see *The Nutcracker*, they don't assume that I am wearing a Lil' Kim Blonde, wig and are educated and aware that it is a veil, and we *all* wear it and just because you see a Black woman on stage, in an Arabian costume that *everybody* wears, you don't immediately go to Lil' Kim.

While the Aesha and I discussed stereotypes, another dancer, currently dancing for San Francisco Ballet, acknowledges, in the following quote, that stereotypes of Black people and White supremacy as historically embedded in ballet.

> But now my understanding of race is not about malicious actions necessarily or malicious thoughts; it's just the fact of white supremacy… and there's years and years of what Black people are or what they should look like and all of these things and so it's not always about attacking me personally. It's about the stereotype already in place.

Similarly, another current dancer, Daphne, discussed her understanding of how employers in ballet incorporate Black women in ways that remarginalize them:

> They don't want to see a Black ballerina in a bun, or a tutu or the tights, or the pointe shoe. They don't want you to look like that traditional image. They want you looking very contemporary as possible.

A retired (principal) dancer echoed what the previous dancers had argued when describing challenges that Black women negotiate as ballerinas:

> When I was supposed to do La Sylphide, they were like, "Oh, she won't be soft. I mean yeah she can jump but she can't be soft." It's just like when you have a soft dancer that needs to do something like the black swan, like the white swan and the black swan has two personalities –one is soft and one is harder or more sexier but it's the same ballet dancer with the same body, it's just a personality shift so I call bullshit on that... Just like the whole idea of the Black personality –you know like what's seen on TV, the media or wherever… like what people may think or just pure ignorance that there is vulnerability and there is softness and there is strength and there are all these many things we can be.

The women in this study resisted being pushed out of ballet and were constantly working towards challenging controlling images by showing how multidimensional Black women can be. They all mentioned, however, how it is up to society to be open to receiving them in a multidimensional light. McCarthy-Brown (2010) has argued that this common experience of typecasting Black women in roles that reiterate controlling images of Black women works to protect racial hierarchies embedded in ballet. "An African American ballerina undermines established racial hierarchy by implying that African American women can attain a position of femininity and beauty and be acceptable objects of the white male 'gaze'" (2010: 407). Black women in ballet disrupt stereotypes and controlling images by challenging the myths that have historically worked to justify their exclusion and so casting them in roles or describing them in ways that reiterate

controlling images works to (re)maintain racial hierarchies they challenge just by existing in ballet.

*Access to Cultural Gatekeepers*

While there are parents that have the financial means but just cannot justify it, and some parents with the cultural capital to know how to navigate the ballet industry, there are still Black parents that do not have the cultural understanding of how to access this exclusive space. There are also many gatekeepers that are creating additional racialized constraints for Black dancers. Aesha states,

> I just sort of fell into ballet. But once we started going into auditioning for summer courses, my mom found out that people were auditioning for summer courses and the closest thing for us was New York so we were just like, "Okay, New York." And what was there? SAB [School of American Ballet]. I mean, it wasn't planned. We weren't like School of American Ballet; we're going to go seek it out. It was a lot of ignorance just going into it like, "This is here, this is where you're going to go." So, when people found out that I was going to go away and start auditioning someone told my mother that it's going to be hard for me, as a woman of color, to do ballet. So, when I heard that, I knew that's what I needed to do.

Aesha stated how she and her mother researched how to access this industry professionally but were faced with discriminatory and racist comments as to why she would not make it into ballet professionally. This negative form of gatekeeping helps maintain the "tradition" of this perception that ballet is a White elite space. Debra experienced a similar situation as she shares,

> One of my best friends (who is white) was taking ballet with this woman in a very tiny, little studio. And when I started to dance there, she told my parents, after a few weeks or months, that I have no talent [Debra laughs. And she continues] And she said that they shouldn't be wasting their money. So, my parents were like, "Well that's ridiculous, she's only 8 years old." And so, they took me out of the studio and to a ballet school. The [ballet] school was connected to Carnegie Hall [in New York City]. I was really fortunate because my teacher that taught in the Bronx was a soloist from New York City Ballet. So, it was almost a blessing in disguise because I actually got really good training when I was about 8 ½- 9.

Debra then went on to Dance with New York City Ballet and Pennsylvania Ballet in which she became the very first Black principal dancer at a major ballet company in the United States in 1982.

By addressing whiteness in ballet, it is important to highlight that this includes the role of gatekeepers and how they internalize racists myths and stereotypes associated with Black dancers. These gatekeepers try to push Black dancers out of ballet at an early age as was the case for both Aesha and Debra despite actually considering their talent. Not only were their talents disregarded, but in the case of Debra's experience, the teacher also reinforced the stigma that her parents couldn't afford to "waste" their money if she wasn't promised a successful future as a professional. This demonstrating how others in the ballet industry assume that Black people lack access to economic and cultural capital.

Gatekeepers go beyond the teachers and choreographers; they are also board members and donors. As Aesha states,

> I have a strong sense that, behind the scenes, donors are saying that they don't want to see African Americans promoted in ballet. They want to see Giselles as pale, and they want things to remain how they are – for the 'pure' swans to look like the traditional swans they've seen their whole lives.

These racist ideologies and the power structures set within these creative industries perpetuate racialized exclusion for Black dancers and create additional constraints within their attainment.

While discussing access and networking within industries, Alicia addresses how more Black students need to be funneled into the right schools that will allow them to be seen by major companies and be competitive applicants. Alicia states,

> We don't have enough Black kids training in programs that will elicit a high-quality professional dancer. There are a lot of kids of color training, but are they training at SAB? Are they training at Pacific Northwest Ballet? Are they training at Miami City Ballet? Are they training at those schools that create stars in those companies? So that's what we have to look at. There are companies that are making great efforts, I feel. I know American Ballet Theatre with the Project Pile has done some great things. I know Boston Ballet has done some things. I think everybody's making an effort, but it takes time to grow as a dancer. Like I said, every generation, there's usually only one or two. So that means that there has to be a huge influx of more highly classically trained Black ballet dancers for us to see more in these major companies.

Alicia discusses how there needs to be more Black dancers getting funneled into these elite ballet schools and by not having the capital or being in a class with a teacher/mentor that has the capital and best interest, many dancers do not get that opportunity. Robyn discussed her experience of coming from a family that did not have the capital and network to navigate this exclusive industry. However, she had a teacher that assisted her and guided her in the right direction. She states,

> I started in a small school in South Central Los Angeles, CA, which was/is a predominantly Black area, and so I started when I was three years old at MC dance school. I was kind of like the ham in the class and one day when I was about 10 years old, she [the dance teacher] told me about an audition that she wanted me to go to and it was for Los Angeles Ballet and that was the big company in LA. It was under the direction of a former principal dancer with New York City Ballet and his teacher came from New York to join him in opening the company. I got into Nutcracker and then after getting into Nutcracker, he asked me if I would stay, and they would give me a scholarship. So, I ended up leaving my small school to a much bigger school and started dancing there… I was actually lucky enough to be at a school with a teacher that knew the right steps to take to become a professional.

Cynthia also shares the support she received from someone within the ballet institution. She states,

> It was interesting because a legend ballerina from Russia who went to Monte Carlo and came here [to New York City Ballet]. She was one of Balanchine's wives. She was one of our teachers and she supported me. And I think it was because of her, I don't know she saw something in me despite my diversity, she's

> the one that pulled me into the broom closet to show me her bra and suggest that I start wearing one (laughs) and kind of helping me out and was showing me the type of support I needed and stuff so it was clear that she was supportive and because of her relationship with Balanchine, she may have discussed that with him because she could see what the management was doing.

Robyn, Cynthia, and Debra (once she started attending the ballet school in the Bronx) had dance teachers that took interest in their talents, opposed to pushing them out, as was the case for Debra at her first studio and the case for many Black dancers', and that provided them with the cultural capital and networking needed to attain the right direction towards becoming a professional ballet dancer. Today, ballet typically does not just hold auditions to join the company; there are particular schools and summer intensives that are required in order to get funneled into the ballet company. However, one who may not have this cultural insight may only know this through *gatekeepers*, such as dance teachers who will encourage and accept Black dancers into their schools and summer intensives and as we saw with Robyn and continue to support them through their experience as was the case for Cynthia.

As mentioned, Bourdieu's concept of *schemata of classification* addresses how those who control the schemata of classification control the social space and the social positions and for many ballet gatekeepers, they utilized this in efforts to limit and exclude Black dancers. Through gatekeepers and historical systemic racism, particularly in ballet, many Black dancers then experience similar discriminatory and racist comments that then either push them out of ballet or add to a racialized fatigue that inevitably creates the perception of not belonging in ballet. Many Black dancers make the comment "it's not the space for me" or they "knew" that they could never perform certain principal roles

that were iconic or considered classical. A few of my participants shared how they did not think they would have major principal roles. Cynthia shares,

> I could never be a Swan Queen. They [the roles] were just more of the Stravinsky pieces. They were the more neoclassic pieces oppose to the… I did do demi soloist in quite a few ballets later on but when I started getting more roles, I was casted like; Jerome Robbins did a piece called Rag Time and I got to perform it. I was the understudy to Megan and Michael, and I were the second cast; the two Black people for Rag Time. You know it's that kind of thing and sure, if you're directing a film and you have a certain piece that reflects a certain character or demographic, that's what you're going to go with if you have access to it. But I remember that being a little frustrating because I thought, when I got older, I started to think; well, I'm never going to get to be the Swan Queen. There were certain roles that I coveted that I realized may never be in my grasp.

Another participant Lauren shares the support and encouragement she received from her artistic director despite her own doubts. She stated,

> Interesting enough during the spring show, everyone in the school is in the spring show and that year it was Alice in Wonderland. So, I look at the cast list and I look at the cast list and I see Anderson Alice and then a whole bunch of other names and so I'm thinking it's some other chick that has the same last name – Anderson because we know Alice is blonde and the girl that played her in the original was a blonde chick. So, I go into the office, and I'm upset and he [Mark] happens to be in there and I say, "Why am I not in the performance? Why am I the only child not in the performance? Why am I not in Alice in Wonderland?" and he looked at me, strangely, and he said to me in his British voice, he's British, "Darling, your Alice." And I looked at him and said, "But I can't be Alice, Alice is white."

Also, Jenelle Figgins shares in an interview with Dance Magazine, "Because of ballet's elitism, Black dancers cannot see themselves being part of it. Ballet is still on reserve for the rich, but it should be for everyone" (Figgins in Salvatto's article 2021). Cynthia, Lauren and Jenelle all share this understanding that they would never be able to perform certain principal roles because of the stigma, the lack of representation and the ideology that Black women were not able to have these roles. For Lauren specifically, she was assumed and in denial that she received a principal role reiterating the habitus that

has been created for Black ballet dancers due to the racial exclusion and discrimination that Black dancers have historically experienced within ballet. These negative and positive examples of Black women's experiences with gatekeepers demonstrate the battle that gatekeepers are also negotiating in regard to tradition. As we see with the artistic director and Lauren, by him casting her as Alice, he is going against the *tradition* and trying to reinvent the raced and classed exclusion within ballet and also helping to provide a pathway for Lauren and other Black dancers[46]. While we see how positive forms of gatekeeping challenge the raced and classed ideology, the other forms of gatekeeping work to maintain traditions of old, predominantly white highbrow cultural industries which create constraints for and exclude Black dancers.

Bourdieu's concept of *schemata of classification* and the historical racialized belief of whiteness as normative (Banks 2010; and McIntosh 2001) enable a cycle in which there is a lack of representation of Black dancers that then creates the perception that Black dancers do not belong in certain roles and spaces. This also ties into how Black parents decide if they want to invest in ballet, for their children, understanding this cultural space is exclusive and is powered behind predominately white elites. These concepts and cultural constraints are barriers that Black dancers face when attempting to attain a career within ballet. It is not the homogenized stereotypes that Black people cannot afford ballet or that Black people do not have the "right" look, it is that racism and Whiteness create racialized barriers within these cultural fields and make Black people feel not welcomed in the space. As Coral –a Harvard graduate and former dancer shares,

> My parents both grew up working class and then worked really hard and aspired to a point in their careers where they were able to give my sister and I more or less a middle-class upbringing…And so at my old school there was a lot more stratification and just diversity socioeconomically as well, because I knew their

> students at that program who had less than me and their students, who had more than me and their students were kind of similar to me and everything in between. Whereas when I went to this other school overall, the sensibility it got was like, these are mostly privileged white girls who have had privilege in their family for generations, and some of them were actually quite wealthy. And so, I've never quite been in that environment. And it was hard. It was awkward. And I think there are a lot of also cultural assumptions coming from my classmates where they also probably hadn't had a lot of experiences with a middle-class black girl. The black people they knew were probably very specific in their circles and had figured out how to work with the environments they're in. And so, I think as much as I was struggling with, like just mastering the technique and trying to catch up with all of my classmates, I was also just trying to figure out how to survive among them, because, you know, I mean, some people were kind and welcoming, but not across the board. And I just remember some people just being really hard to deal with and feeling really uncomfortable with them, but also wanting to get along and not antagonize anyone. So, at the same time as they had their opinions, I had a completely incoherent, not fully developed, strong sense of Black pride and kind of like, I don't want to have to adjust myself in any way for them.

## CONCLUSION

The significance of this research is to (1) demonstrate that cultural fields have not fully unpacked the racialized experiences that Black creatives experience, (2) combat the racialized stigmas and myths in regard to the lack of Black ballet dancers and to debunk the monolithic ideology of Black dancers and, (3) demonstrate how Black ballet dancers attain professional careers in ballet despite the racial constraints. These findings contribute to the limited scholarship of race and culture by expanding knowledge of the various racialized experiences of Black people within creative industries.

I address the limited scholarship around cultural fields and racialized experiences for Black creatives. Bonilla-Silva (1996) bridges Bourdieu’s examination of social space and symbolic power through a racialized lens with the concept of *racialized social systems*. There is still a lack of conversation around race and cultural industries; however, I share how the intersections of race and even how gender plays a role in the experiences of

Black creatives. Black creatives experience a racialized constraint within the creative industry that affects their experience and access into these spaces from an intersectional lens. By solely engaging and publishing literature that is perceived within a cultural proximity to oneself, it creates an unequal demographic representation that only increases the inequality within these conversations (Childress and Nault 2019).

The racialized exclusion and ideology of maintaining whiteness within ballet has been maintained through the myths and stigmas that are constantly being repeated and circulated as a way to exclude Black ballet dancers. Similar to Gualtieri's scholarship (2021), these racialized stigmas affect the way in which creative producers—from chefs at ethnic restaurants to Black ballet dancers—are perceived before they even have a chance to showcase their talent. Throughout my research, I combat these stigmas and myths by displaying the various ways in which Black dancers attain economic capital with an elite and expensive activity such as ballet. This not only addresses the elitism within ballet and overall financial inequality that affects anyone who cannot afford ballet but also debunks the stigma that all Black people are poor and do not have the economic or cultural capital to navigate ballet.

Despite these stigmas, myths and overall forms of discrimination, Black ballet dancers as well as Black professionals (Wingfield 2010) narrate how they attain professional careers. Adia Harvey Wingfield (2010) addresses how Black professionals negotiate racialized "feeling rules" in which they manage a racialized emotional labor. This is the same case for Black ballet dancers. Black dancers experience forms of discrimination, which can be symbolic and/or overt. Black dancers are discriminated against through aesthetic requirements that are embedded in Whiteness and Eurocentric

ideals of beauty. They also experience overt forms of discrimination through myths and stereotypes that are internalized by gatekeepers. While some gatekeepers challenged and negotiated tradition, there are still gatekeepers that want to keep ballet as an exclusive White industry –catering to its *tradition* similarly to other traditional highbrow industries, such as Shakespeare theatre and classical symphonies. Maintaining this form of tradition creates racialized constraints of attainment for Black dancers, racial fatigue, and a constant feeling of exclusion. Gatekeepers that perpetuate forms of exclusion, can be ballet teachers, choreographers and even donors. They then maintain power of who they want to see and accept into the ballet industry (Swartz 1997). Childress and Nault (2019) addresses the importance of expanding and diversifying the range of gatekeepers within these creative industries which will help dismantle these exclusive, racist spaces and ideologies. These forms of cultural matching are micro-interactive theories of networking between individuals (Rivera 2012). For ballet dancers, the way in which they gain access into the professional setting of ballet and the casting of dancers in performances is highly determined by gatekeepers. Expanding the range of gatekeepers racially and by gender will challenge the exclusion and racialized "tradition" of whiteness within ballet.

The discourse around race and culture is important to discuss because so many industries within culture neglect to interrogate the lack of representation of Black creatives. Similar to art, fashion, modeling and many other creative industries, ballet has created racialized stigmas, stereotypes, and myths as reasoning for the lack of Black ballet dancers. These racialized assumptions as to why there are a lack of Black dancers, similar to Lauren Brown's (2018) analysis, do not hold; however, what does hold and

remains significant is a mixture of cultural and organizational boundaries, within creative spaces, complicating narratives of racism and homogenization of Black people.

Again, culture reflects power through containing ideas, beliefs and traditions within a group or society (Swartz 1997). Within high-status cultural industries, privilege and social constructs revolving around Whiteness and elitism only enhance the legitimacy of racialized social hierarchies and create exclusion. Similarly, to curators regarding museums, ballet is also faced with gatekeepers that maintain both power and influence with the production of who is being given access and the battle of tradition. This battle of tradition influences who is attending and occupying the space. These racialized barriers create racial fatigue but also self-doubt in which some Black dancers begin to internalize those certain spaces and roles are not for them. It is important to expand the range and diversify the industry's gatekeepers. The idea of challenging tradition expands the range of people who can access these spaces as well as expands the range of the literature that studies these spaces, and therefore literature around race and culture is important.

The concept of "Ballet is Woman" is a very directly towards a very specific woman. Throughout the twentieth century, the intended *woman* is described as a thin, almost prepubescent, White, middle-class heterosexual woman and through symbolic and direct interactions, Black women understand that they are not the intended woman, and that ballet is not an inclusive space for them. Therefore, Black women have navigated a racialized and gendered way of attaining the aesthetic requirements while producing a particular emotional labor to appear grateful and a "good" employee within this cultural space.

[46] George Balanchine would admit Black women into the ballet school e.g., School of American Ballet but the company, he would not until the 1970s.

[46] I will note that Llanchie (Aminah) was the only dancer at the company who had been dancing at company professionally and had professional experience prior to attending this particular company.

[46] Bare legs were too risqué for Parisians in the early 1800s, when ballet was forming its identity. So, the Paris Opera Ballet sought to create pink tights and shoes, which complimented the all-white company's skin tone and would appear nude. They went with ballet pink because it was the closest thing to nude without being considered problematic and ignominy (Hayes 2021). However, ballet pink does not compliment darker skin tones. It actually cuts off their balletic lines and is not considered a nude or neutral color for them.

[46] Enculturated somatophobia is White people's fear of the body that is constantly reinforced through cultural norms and institutions (Gottschild 2003). Gottschild confronts this fear white people have of the Black body and how it has been historically instilled and connected to this fear of White people losing their power and privilege.

[46] I do want to note that in 1943, Betty Nichols was the first Black woman to dance at the School of American Ballet (SAB) under George Balanchine –Choreographer and artistic director and Lincoln Kirstein –who was a writer, art connoisseur, philanthropist, and cultural figure in New York City (Lobenthal 2013). At that time, of Betty Nichols career at SAB, New York City Ballet was not founded yet. The School of American Ballet was the producing company at the time and then merged into Ballet Society in she appeared, in 1946, only in ballets choreographed by people. She moved on in 1949.

[46] In 1975, a ballet director stated "The carriage of the Black dancer is not classic. It's the position of the spine. The litany of bodily excesses and deficiencies lay at the ready to exclude the Black body from miscegenation within the White body or corps de ballet: critics rhetorically constructed and essentialized the black dancer as possessing a too-stocky bone structure, protruding buttocks, and feet that were too flat and too large" (Gaiser 2006: 272). In ballet, these racist beliefs still pervade the industry. In 2014, an executive director told *Pointe Magazine*, "I've heard from the mouths of dance professionals that Black dancers categorically cannot become ballet dancers because they don't have the right body" (Robinson 2021).

[46] I further acknowledge and discuss my choice in not elaborating on colorism in Appendix A.

[46] The Crown Act is not yet acknowledged in every state within the United States

[46] Only 1.2 percent of major museum collections are of/from Black artist (Pollard 2021), Black models make up about six percent on the runway during fashion week (Newman 2017) and in 2015, it was reported that less than 4 percent of the 260 fashion designers in New York Fashion week are Black (NY Times 2015) and about one percent were covered in VogueRunway.com (AFP 2017).

[46] Ballet pointe shoes and tights are typically a blush pink color–*ballet pink. Ballet pink* has roots in the 18th and 19th centuries as being as close to 'nude' as dancers could get without causing a scandal. However, the overall idea was to match or complement the skin tone of the dancers to extend their lines and so the tights and shoes don't become the distraction. Given that ballet dancers have been predominantly White, *ballet pink* has prevailed long as a form of 'tradition' and has gone unquestioned, but it has now caused a conversation of exclusion (Howard 2018).

## CHAPTER 3

## ACT 2: THE PAS DE DEUX OF EMOTIONAL AND AESTHETIC LABOR

> *"You lied to me, because you never intended that I should be free, and I lied to you because I pretended that was all right" –James Baldwin*

One of ballet's central choreographic makeups is the *pas de deux*, which translates to "step of two." As Novack describes, it is a structure that "evokes romantic, heterosexual love on both a literal and metaphoric level, emphasizing opposing characteristics and distinctions between male and female" (43). The pas de deux evolved in the late 18$^{th}$ early 19$^{th}$ century and ballet master Marius Petipa played a key role in its evolution. The pas de deux was first "used as an opening act for operas and ballets where the couple would perform identical steps occasionally holding hands" (https://blog.balletaz.org/ballet-101-pas-de-deux-breakdown/). During the Baroque era it became more dramatic using elements of pantomime. Then during the Romantic era, in

which it really evolved, it became the pas de deux we see today aligning with the shift in a man's role within ballet (https://blog.balletaz.org/ballet-101-pas-de-deux-breakdown/). The pas de deux is an emblem of a classic gender asymmetry and a visual representation of how I theorize emotional and aesthetic labor. Both within the pas de deux and my theorization of how emotional and aesthetic labor are a gendered pair that are dependent on one another.

**The Body/Self: Conjoining Emotional and Aesthetic Labor**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, aesthetic labor and emotional labor are heavily used within work, occupations, and service work scholarship (Wingfield 2010; Gruys 2012; Mears 2014; Misra and Walters 2022) however, while these two forms of labor are used, they are not often used together. Sociologist have recognized the significance of emotions within the workplace since Arlie Hochschild's conception of 'emotional labor' in her work *The Managed Heart* (1983). While theorizing the emotional self, labor scholars have moved away from the embodied self. Emotional labor does indeed include the body; early work on emotional displays notably Goffman's presentation of self, implicated the body as a surface for emotional controls. Hochschild's work on the smile as an embodied artifice also includes ways in which emotions are embodied. Emotional labor in fact enrolls the body and embodiment work and while this has been argued, here' I reiterate how emotional and aesthetic labor need to comeback and always be associated as in separatable while also racializing and gendering them as well.

Here we see how aesthetic labor raises the question, how do dancers both "look good" and "dance well" when there are no specific rules? Emotional labor raises the question, how does the dancer manage their emotions both on and off the stage? Ballet is

paradigmatic of aesthetic labor for all dancers and emotional labor is performed but all women within ballet but how does one navigate a space that bases its aesthetic requirements on unrealistic body images and, as Misra and Walters refer to, *racialized beauty hierarchies* that enforce beauty norms that generally favor Whiteness (Mirsa and Walters 2022).

Black dancers negotiate two forms of labor that have typically been theorized separately: emotional and aesthetic labor. Similar to Entwistle and Wissinger (2006), I demonstrate how aesthetic workers, in this case Black women in ballet, are more than just an aesthetic surface; they produce a racialized self, identity, and personality that make their occupation both physical and emotional. Building on Entwistle and Wissinger's suggestion, I show how the aesthetic labor that Black women endure in ballet cannot be fully understood without understanding the emotional labor that accompanies it; similarly, a complete analysis of the emotional labor they tolerate requires understanding the embodied consequences of this tolerance. This challenges the ways aesthetic labor was initially theorized and builds on a great deal of work that has made use of these concepts to study workplace inequality.

Scholarship on aesthetic labor has focused on service industries in which workers' bodies are commodified by highly regulated and strictly managed workforces to display company branding and a corporate aesthetic (Entwistle and Wissinger 2006; Freeman 1993, 2000; Hochschild 1983; Taylor and Tyler 2000; Tyler and Taylor 1998). The body is used as an accumulation strategy to creatively discover new ways that the body can be the bearer of the labor capacity (Harvey 1998:406). The interactive service workers that Witz, Warhurst and Nickson (2003) address are managed in relation to corporate image,

models, actors, athletes, retail workers and ballet dancers. They are the "embodied capacities and attributes possessed by workers" (Williams and Connell 2010) and considers "a worker's deportment, style, accent, voice, and attractiveness" (Williams and Connell 2010). However, work on their bodies in relation to aesthetic codes in different ways is largely self-managed both during and outside of work (Entwistle and Wissinger 2006). Therefore, employers emphasize the dancers' bodies while undermining their humanity. Dancers' bodies are not attractions; for these dancers, their bodies are more than just an external surface but are more broadly reflective of their identity and self; meaning they reflect racial gender, sexual and class identities, ideologies, and material realities. Aesthetic labor demands neglects to consider and acknowledge the amount of emotional labor the dancers also must withstand.

Scholars such as Sabrina Strings (2019 and 2019), Nguyen (2011), Craig (2002) and Glenn 2008), provide a more intersectional approach when discussing aspirational and ascetic bodies and bourgeois beauty regimes. The ideology of whiteness covertly and overtly structuring mainstream notions of beauty that interpellated affluent white women, others non-white women's beauty in which adds a racialized and classed aesthetic labor that does not favor anyone who is not an affluent white woman. Within modeling (Mears and Finlay 2005; Mears 2011), mainstream yoga (Stings, Headen and Spencer 2019), entertainment and ballet, we see how mainstream hegemonic ideologies of femininity and beauty neglect to consider and include anyone other than affluent white women.

The significance and laboring of being aesthetic within certain occupations and within certain cultural spaces has been documented for some time e.g., C. Wright Mills 1951 book *White Collar*. Laboring to be aesthetic is not new and labor scholars have

elevated the scholarship to examine the explicit management, recruitment, and training of workers' appearances in an expanding occupational range. Particular requirements of aesthetics, within spaces such as ballet, strive for the right *fit* between company brand identity and the dancer's identity similar to Pettinger addressing brand identities and employee identity within retail (Pettinger 2004). While trying to achieve or maintain this aesthetic, it requires an emotional component to it.

For starters, maintaining or achieving a particular aesthetic can have an effect on one's emotions in the sense that it is another full-time job to maintain a particular look. Specifically in spaces such as modeling, acting, and ballet, they require a very specific body type, as previously mentioned and to maintain it, it requires a particular diet and workout regime. It is also the emotional labor that the dancers must perform both on and off stage. Scholars have reinterpreted the concept of emotional labor in multiple ways and the three that I will address, relate to the multiple ways in which ballet dancers perform emotional labor. 1)Emotional labor can require an added burden in order to provide levels of comforts to satisfy clients and customers while ignoring their personal emotions. 2) Emotional labor can be used to defend themselves and to deflect the humiliation that they may encounter in their occupation. 3) One can engage in emotional labor because they are pleasing their clients or customers. Throughout this chapter, I address these multiple forms of emotional labor and how they are attached to the aesthetic labor that is required of the dancers.

In a study of workers in New York City nail salons, Miliann Kang (2010) argues that emotional labor subtly requires an added burden for salon employees by demanding certain emotional performances aimed at producing specific types and levels of comforts

to satisfy clients and customers often causing them to ignore their personal emotions. Debra describes how her external self was racialized and fetishized when her director asked her to perform labor at odds with the classic aesthetic of a classical ballerina. As mentioned in the previous chapter, ballet has a particular and rigid required look that classical ballet companies particularly abide by (except for rare occasions when they are performing new/more contemporary repertoires). Here, Debra describes a situation in which she solely was asked to create a racialized look. As she shares this encounter, she describes how she had to perform this emotional labor in order to not offend the choreographer despite feeling offended herself. She shares,

> That was the look of New York City Ballet; very slicked back [bun] so we had to use a lot of hair spray and have a high bun… So, I wore my hair like everyone else in a high bun… I was a fairy, he [the director] actually wanted me to wear my hair natural and I was like, "[Director], I don't think so" (laughs). "I'm with the New York City Ballet and I don't know if I should wear my hair like that." And the music that it was, it was an opera that sort of had this African theme to it… and I was like, "No, I don't want to wear my hair like this on stage."

Debra describes the aesthetic labor requested by her company and the standard balletic look with the look that the director solely requested of her, the only Black woman, within the space. She expressed deep frustration but did not want to display that frustration toward the director. So, she navigated her frustration in a joking manner when addressing him. Hochschild (1983) referred to this as a classic concept of managing deep emotions. This is part of emotional labor in which the flight attendants, in her study, perform to "induce or suppress" their true feelings in order to "sustain an outward appearance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (1983:7). Other scholarship has utilized this concept and documented a racialized conceptualization amongst Black workers (e.g., Wingfield 2010). Debra was being asked to perform aesthetic labor contradicting the

ideal look required for ballet dancers while also being racially fetishized and, implicitly, asked to not be frustrated by the demand. Debra described something other women I interviewed mentioned as well: masking the humiliation and awkwardness of the situation to not offend others and to maintain "professionalism." Other work has documented ways that what counts as "professional" behavior often works to remarginalize groups of already marginalized workers (Connell 1993).

Also, Debra does not get outwardly express how upset she is by the director fetishizing her Blackness, she instead laughed and declined "professionally." Not only was aesthetic and emotional labor being performed simultaneously, but it is difficult to identify one without acknowledging a relationship with the other. In other words, these aesthetic labor demands came with emotional labor consequences. In fact, the director was overemphasizing and imagining himself as temporarily producing a "Black friendly" space for Debra. But it came with attendant aesthetic labor demands that Debra felt shored up racialized stereotypes and interpreted as additional labor that made her uncomfortable. Similarly, Giuffre, Dellinger, and Williams' study of "Gay Friendly" workplaces discovered that so-called "gay-friendly" workplaces often fetishized their gay employees by making them perform hyper-visibility in regard to their gayness (Giuffre, Dellinger and Williams 2008). For both Debra and Giuffre, Dellinger, and Williams' (2008) participants, are all performing aesthetic and emotional labor simultaneously, though Giuffre et al. (2008) do not explicitly highlight emotional and aesthetic labor as one, focusing exclusively on aesthetic labor demands. Their participants and mine, however, are performing *both* aesthetic *and* emotional labor, as I have shown here.

Similarly, Aesha described an incident that might be classified as simple surface aesthetics. However, as she narrated the experience to me, it was extremely emotionally fraught for her. She states,

> I remember I was in Europe… and my hair was still natural, and I just had it wet, gelled and put up and as he was choreographing, he was like, "Everyone take your hair down. I want to see." And I was like, "Ugh" (laughs), "like seriously?" And he was like, "Yeah. Just take it out.… And it got to me, and I'm like this 100% natural girl, and I just sort of took it and just puffed it out and everyone just starts laughing and I was just like, "Well" ... completely mortified and just to have everyone else laughing really hurt my feelings. But in front of them I had to act strong. But inside, I wanted to cry.

The emotional labor required to navigate the aesthetic demands placed on Debra and Aesha were not unique to either of them. All of the women in my study described similar emotional labor, that they relied on, to navigate the unique aesthetic demands they faced as *Black* women in ballet. When they were fetishized and teased for their appearances in a context historically defined, in part, by their exclusion, they all described an intense emotional resilience required to persist—conveying a set of feelings they did not actually *feel*. Having to manage deep emotions while displaying a look of professionalism is a way to "induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain an outward appearance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (Hochschild, 1983: 7) all while trying to prove that their Black body can be in this white space of ballet.

Ballet dancers not only have to maintain a form of bodily capital and disciplined bodies (Foucault 1975), but they also have to perform and maintain a particular role (e.g., Goffman 1959). Ballet dancers are performing roles through their emotional and aesthetic practices to satisfy directors, ballet masters and mistresses, and ultimately paying clients (audience members). Indeed, ballet dancers are not only dancing; they are acting as well. While performing, ballet dancers are required to create an illusion for their audience. This

is broadly consistent with Hochschild's (1983) descriptions of the "deep acting" (48-49) –in which she theorizes as integral to explaining emotional labor. But the labor goes beyond concealing authentic feelings to conform to narrow emotion rules as bodies are intimately entangled in this labor as well.

In *Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis of social life, offers a powerful illustration of his conceptualization of *impression management*. Dramaturgy refers to a structure of social interactions i.e., roles that people play while interacting with one another (Goffman 1959). Goffman (1959) argues that the role being performed requires an image of professionalism and acquires a particular cultural capital, offering a powerful illustration of Goffman's (1959) conceptualization of *impression management*.

While continuing to analyze the emotional labor and aesthetic labor that the Black ballet dancers perform, I noticed that some of my participants displayed a for of emotional labor in which they utilized to deflect humiliation. Ashley Mears and William Finlay (2005) argue that fashion models employ emotional labor to defend themselves and to deflect the humiliation of constant rejection and judgement they encounter in their occupation. Coral shares an experience in which she felt offended and embarrassed because of comments the director made/insinuated regarding her body. She shares,

> I just remember being in that partnering [pas de deux] class and I just remember being the only Black girl and paired with this young man who super sweet, but he wasn't fully in his strength or his body yet. And I was more or less in mine. And he was paired with me and a very petite Asian woman who's about five feet and I'm sure under one hundred pounds. And so, looking at those two options, obviously he's going to be like, I prefer to work with her. And so, in a way, you can't even be offended. But the thing is, it's your very body. It's your being. And

so, like, I want to be able to disassociate and be like, well, I understand why he might have a preference. And it's not personal, but still hurts. It's painful. And then I remember he was supposed to do this press lift and he was struggling but not just with me but with both of us and the teacher turns to him and was like "look at her [speaking about the Asian woman] you can lift her" and then he turns to be and was like and Coral jumps so that should help (laughs).And then he was like "you're a warrior, you can take that on [referring to lifting Coral]" and I'm like dude, I am standing right here. And I remember that really affecting me, but I couldn't say anything and so I just stood there and acted like it wasn't a big deal.

The Black women in my study experienced overlapping emotional and embodied demands. Indeed, as I show here, neither emotional nor aesthetic labor is completely understandable without understanding their relationship with one another. While Hochschild did not use the term "aesthetic labor," the experiences of the Black women I interviewed reiterate Hochschild's (1983) analysis of the relationship between embodiment and emotions present in many jobs in a service economy. My data show that aesthetic labor comes with attendant emotional labor. Here, I argue that to suggest that this labor is *either* aesthetic *or* emotional labor misses the point. Both forms of labor are racialized, have a symbiotic relationship, and produce all-encompassing forms of workplace inequality for the Black women in this study.

*The Embodied Consequences of "Emotional Labor"*

Wingfield (2010) argues that Black professionals find themselves experiencing two types of racialized feeling rules: 1) rules that generally apply to all workers but are particularly difficult for Black professionals to follow, and 2) those that differ from the rules available to their white counterparts. She shows how Black employees find that the feeling rules in the workplace are not racially neutral and work to Black workers' collective disadvantage. Wingfield does not explicitly address aesthetic labor that might coincide with the racialized rules associated with emotional demands that Black

professionals experience. Yet, consider one of her participants describing a white woman's comments about a Black woman's hair: "I work with a woman who is a complete racist and culturally clueless. And what do I do when she tells the biracial woman on our team that her hair looks like a poodle's?" (Wingfield 2010:261). This is emotional labor, but it is also manifestly about embodiment. There becomes a clash of what Entwistle and Wissinger (2006:786) describe as objectified and subjective body poses. Black employees have to identify how to navigate the demands of their work with their Blackness—as though Blackness is at odds with those demands. And, as I document in this study, these forms of inequality are on unusual display in the industry of elite ballet.

The directors, administrators, and dancers share the goal of providing emotionally fulfilling entertainment for their audience members. Dancers also perform emotional labor for the directors and choreographers to secure preferred roles and maintain their job similar to models who perform a specific emotional labor in front of potential employers (e.g., Mears and Finlay 2005). For Black women in ballet, however, there are gendered, *and* racialized dimensions associated with this emotional labor. For example, Robyn describes how the constant aesthetic labor and the racial discrimination she faced affected her ability to perform the emotional *and* aesthetic labor demanded of a career in ballet. She shares,

> It got to me in an emotional way to where I couldn't move. They asked me to come to a rehearsal for *Themes and Variations* towards the end… It's a ballet that I adore… the choreography just stays in your body… I got to that rehearsal, and I couldn't do it. I physically was messing up. I went into the dress rehearsals crying and I knew that was my bottom and it was towards the end and so it was like the best and worst time of my life.

The constant aesthetic surface work and demands, particularly the racialized demands towards Black women, requires a mental and emotional engagement and over time. The surface and the feeling begin to blend into one and creates a *racial fatigue*. Similar to Robyn, Serenity shares hot the aesthetic demands wore on her mentally and emotionally. She states,

> It got you in all the places and all your emotions, all physically, mentally. I'll take an accounting class any day but ballet (laughs) I'd hold it in and then be in the bathroom crying almost after every class because I was upset that I didn't do this right. I was taking assessment of where I was and where my body was like, how could I approve myself? How can I make my body better? Like, I was really trying to set goals and meet those goals, like on a weekly basis. And I never was that hard on myself in any part of my life.

Andrea, a former dancer, also reached a point where the routine racial discrimination and rejection was overbearing for her body and self:

> The company did a film –*The Nutcracker*. And I was in the snow scene… every year we would do *Nutcracker*, I was the lead snowflake and when we got to the film, they took me out of the part. And the Ballet mistress said to me, "You know why." I realized, you know, that you don't give a crap about me… And that was the main reason why I left the company. I could no longer perform the repertoires with the same energy I once had… My identity was being crushed… I didn't even care anymore.

Robyn and Andrea explain how the constant racialized demands that made their rejection in ballet seem logical or simply "business." However, this trenchant marginalization and discrimination affected them so much *emotionally* ("…went to dress rehearsals crying") that it got to the point where they physically could no longer perform: ("I physically was messing up" / "I could no longer perform… with the same energy"). They were also unable to engage in a "cultural performance" (Sass 2000; Williams 2003) to "save face" to maintain their pride and continue working. It became too hard for them to shake off and they explained a point at which they were faced with *racial fatigue* and

could no longer manage the emotional consequences of the racialized aesthetic demands of ballet.

*Racial battle fatigue* was introduced by scholar William A. Smith. Building off Chester Pierce (1970) and other health psychology scholars, Smith conceptualizes racial battle fatigue through an educational, sociological, and psychological lens as analyzes the area of higher education (Smith 2004). Smith utilizes the framework of racial battle fatigue from the standpoint of universities and how they are operated from a historically, white dominant perspective (Smith 2004, 2009a, 2009b). Within this white dominate environment, whiteness and white privilege are embedded into the culture which results to an accumulation of continuous racial microaggressions towards non-white people. Non-white people, specifically Black and Brown people become physically and emotionally drained by preparing against everyday racial microaggressions they experience simply by existing within these predominately and historically white spaces. And rather than focusing on their academics, or in the case of my study ballet, non-white people may have to divert their energy towards coping with the stress caused by the racial microaggressions (Harrell 2000; Smith 2004). Racial battle fatigue can be defined as a behavioral stress response due to the cumulative impact of microaggressions and discriminations (Smith 2004, 2009a, 2009b) and we see this on display with Robyn and Andrea.

The response to racial battle fatigue can make predominantly white spaces, where racial microaggressions can occur, become particularly hostile and uncomfortable spaces for non-white people as was the case for Krystle as she shares,

> I still want to do this professionally. So, I claim dance as a major. So, my first year, I won’t say it was horrible, but it was very eye opening. I remember going

into dance class, being the only young lady of color and that wouldn't be a problem without any racist overtones that I experience being there. So, the lady who was over the program, at the time, this little white lady brought us all together after putting us in sections and said, "Was there anybody that I didn't call, raise your hand?" And I kind of looked and of course you see me, and I said, "you didn't call me." And she looked and was like "oh, how did I miss you" I know she probably didn't mean anything by it, but it was still sad and to do it in front of everyone, you know, so that kind of set the tone for my experience there. And so, coming towards the end of that first semester, I was crying on my way to dance class and crying on my way back to my room but while I was there, I had to act like everything was fine.

Although, Black and Brown people may have experience racial microaggressions majority of their lives or are aware of the racial hierarchy that they are up against, the added stress of a ballet institution with a negative racial/ethnic environment may be overwhelming for some individuals and eventually take a toll on them. Cynthia shares an example of a very blatant form of discriminated she faced because of her physical appearance and how that affected her emotionally. She shares,

> They wouldn't let me take the class that I was assigned to and so I had to take the next class and he [choreographer and founder of New York City Ballet, George Balanchine] had been to the C2 [a level of ballet class organized by ability] and that's where you get picked from and I was devastated. And I thought, "I'm going to freaking work and make sure I look the part of a professional ballerina." They're not going to put me in that situation. And I cried and I was upset, and I really had to sort of pull myself through because those things sort of happened along the way… but if you use it to push yourself then sometimes, you're successful regardless of people's motives… He came back that evening…to that class that he forced me to take instead and then shortly after that, I was offered a contract.

Cynthia explains a racist experience that she faced, however despite experiencing this blatant form of racism and discrimination, she *still* chose to look past her emotions, and performed a particular emotional labor towards the teachers and administrators and set her mind to just continue pushing through. Cynthia was not given the opportunity to express how she truly felt because she knew that she would then be placed into the

controlling image of the *angry Black woman* or be considered ‘difficult’ to work with and so she continued on like she was not upset –which as we have discussed, is the case for many of the Black women participants, in this study.

While discussing different ways in which emotional labor is performed, Scholar Alexandra Murphy (2003) found that strippers engage in emotional labor because it gives them a sense of satisfaction when they are pleasing their clients or customers. Llanchie (Aminah) shares an experience of discrimination and how she how she had to put her emotions aside at that moment to finish the performance. However, it affected her to where she never forgot this moment. She states:

> Llanchie (Aminah): We got to Burlington, Vermont, when the National Ballet went to Vermont. And when I came out on the stage in Swan Lake, there was hissing and booing
>
> Me: Did anyone say anything?
>
> Llanchie (Aminah): No, we just went on dancing you know, I just went, oh wow. This is crazy and I never forgot that moment. I realize now that in ballet, they want to keep the ballet's exactly the way they were danced for themselves but also for the audience. And if there was not a part for an African American in that ballet then, they felt there shouldn't be one in the ballet and they should keep it exactly the way it is. Unless you do it where everybody is Black.

Llanchie (Aminah) shares an experience that is similar to another former dancer Raven Wilkinson. Raven Wilkinson became the first Black dancer to be part of a major ballet company that stands alone, as a company, and not as an extension of an opera house – The Ballet Russe de Monte-Carlo. Raven Wilkinson would often have to lighten her skin, with make-up for performances, however, she refused to hide her identity if asked directly, despite other non-Black dancers advising Wilkinson to say she was Spanish given her fair complexion (Lansky 2018). Wilkinson toured through Europe and the

United States with the company. When she reached the United States, she encountered extreme racism in Montgomery, Alabama. While at the hotel, that the company was staying at, Wilkinson encountered a Ku Klux Klan convention in the same hotel and people began to hear that there was a Black dancer in the company. Wilkinson and the Artistic Director felt that it would not be safe for her to perform that evening. Following this incident, Wilkinson returned home to New York City and took a hiatus from dancing.

DiMaggio and Ostrower touch on the exclusivity of Black people through Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979) by stating, "Black Americans were excluded from these institutions [ballet] both indirectly, by virtue of educational discrimination and exclusion from white middle-class circles of art appreciators, and directly" (DiMaggio and Ostrower, 1990). Although a slight increase of Black participation in high culture arts audiences took place in the 1930s (DiMaggio and Ostrower, 1990), it is still an on growing struggle that is moving at a very slow rate, especially in ballet.

By understanding the exclusivity of both the ballet companies and the ballet audience, we can then analyze how the racialized and gendered emotional and aesthetic labor are performed backstage as well as on stage. Llanchie (Aminah) and Raven both experienced a hostile audience in the same city. In these cases, we see how the audience members also influence and play a part in the experience of Black women in ballet. The comments and opinions of the audience members are worth noting and have effect on the experiences of Black women in ballet. As we see here with Llanchie (Aminah), Raven Wilkinson, and Aesha (in chapter 1), how they discuss the comments and anticipated comments that the typically elite, White audience members made/make towards them and

their existence within these ballet companies. Both Llanchie and Aesha share how those effects them but despite, they still perform a particular emotional labor as well as aesthetic labor towards them. Aesha performed aesthetic labor by being conscious of the rhinestones and makeup that she put on and how she still had to perform emotional labor after reading the comment she received i.e., "looking like Lil'Kim" and Llanchie (Aminah) as well describes the emotional labor she performed after the racist experience she had while on stage. Raven Wilkinson performs a particular aesthetic labor by lightening her skin and navigating the racial comments that she was faced with, however, once she was in danger, she reached a racial fatigue and could no longer perform the emotional and aesthetic labor required of her.

Cynthia also shares how she understood that she was not able to perform certain roles because of her race and how she was disappointed but just continued to work. She states:

> Cynthia: There were several casts. I wasn't always the first cast so for instance the Prince and the Pauper –it's about these two princes who were twins and took each other's identity. One was a Pauper and the other was a Prince, but they looked alike, you know the story, and so I understudied that because there weren't two Black kids to play the role. So, there were certain things that you always knew you wouldn't be in a position to do because of the circumstances as opposed to your talent.
>
> Me: How did you feel about that?
>
> Cynthia: It sucked but I worked harder. I worked harder.

It is interesting how both Llanchie (Aminah) and Cynthia were both bothered by their situations and the discrimination that they face but just continued on and convinced themselves to just work harder. It aligns with the Black aphorism "As a Black person in white America, you've got to work twice as hard to get half as far." Christopher D.

DeSante explains this cliché and the racialized policies associated with Blackness and deservingness (2013). Even Ebony stated:

> When I was in in it when I first started it, all I was concerned about was being a good technical dancer and just pushing my body to the extremes and working 10 times harder because I am brown skinned.

We also see how aesthetic labor devises rules for feeling. The ballet dancers are crafting sets of feelings and outlooks –which is what Pierre Bourdieu calls habitus (Bourdieu 1984).

The significance of the experiences of Black women in ballet as identifying both emotional *and* aesthetic labor is that racism shaped their experiences of the gendered criticisms of weight, technique, ability, and appearance that all women in ballet face and other aesthetic labor occupations. Similar to my analysis of Wingfield's (2010) study, here I show the interplay between emotional *and* aesthetic labor as best capturing the workplace inequality these women endure.

Some research on emotional and aesthetic labor focuses on the racialization of these forms for labor and attendant consequences (e.g., Wingfield 2010). The constant racialized battle of surface aesthetics and deep emotional labor led many of the Black women in my study to a point where, like Robyn and Aesha, they expressed an inability to continue to perform the emotional labor demanded of *Black* ballet dancers. Understanding this, however, requires seeing the body as more than an externalized object and illustrates how 'keeping up appearances' can be emotionally fraught—and more so for some workers than others. I argue there that understanding the embodied ("aesthetic") consequences of emotional labor better captures the complexity of

intersectional workplace demands that negatively impact Black women's experiences at work.

**Conclusion**

Sociologist can learn much by studying ballet dancers' performances both on and off the stage. As mentioned previously, ballet dancers are a paradigmatic example to examine the shift in labor markets towards aesthetic and emotional labor. Within this cultural space, dancers are recruited and trained to project a beautiful appearance, effortless dance movements and pleasant personas. Sociologists have theorized the place of "personality" and emotions at the workplace, following Hochschild's (1983) classic concept of emotional labor. While Aesthetic labor scholars have emerged the emphasis from emotions to embodiment, theorizing the body work (Nickson et al. 2001; Warhurst et al. 2000; Witz, Warhurst and Nickson 2003) and for some, also including feeling work (Wolkpwitz 2006). The ballet institution demands not only emotional management but corporeal control as well. Aesthetic labor demands transformation of the *whole person* for corporate ends but neglects to consider and acknowledge the amount of emotional labor it requires the dancers to withstand.

Black people's bodies in ballet, as well as many other occupations, have been constantly racialized, discriminated against and marginalized. In ballet specifically, however, we see through a racialized lens how emotional and aesthetic labor affected the experience and retention of Black women in ballet. Through subtle and sometimes blatant racism, we see how Black women in ballet experience a unique form of emotional and aesthetic labor through racism and discrimination. They also still experience the criticisms of weight, technique ability and appearance that all women in ballet face.

Black women became fatigued from performing these intertwining, racialized forms of labor as the body/self-have affected each other in ways that served as a constant reminder that Black bodies were not wanted within ballet. Despite breaking some of these barriers, occupational racial segregation is reiterated here through racialized attire, criticism, and critiques of hair, in addition to even more overtly racist comments.

There is also a gendered gradient to the aesthetic and emotional body/self. An overwhelming majority of men enter ballet through encouragement of artistic directors, choreographers, ballet masters/mistresses and so they enter the field with a different relationship to their body and understand the demand for male bodies as women are socialized to do more generally (West and Zimmerman 1987) and to worry more about being replaced if they do not, please their employers. Throughout Chapter 4, I discuss the experience of Black men in ballet and how it differs from Black women.

Despite gender differences, the body and self are hardly new in the labor markets however, the body and self at work are still intertwined in ways that are challenging to make sense of when emotional and aesthetic labor are treated as discrete forms of workplace demands. The experiences of the Black women in this study demonstrate the utility of understanding the relationships between emotional and aesthetic labor and making sense of the intersecting forms of inequality these intertwining forms of labor often work to support. Through a gendered and racialized lens, we see how and why emotional and aesthetic labor are intertwined. More specifically, it is not possible to separate the body from self when these Black women's identities are viewed through their physical bodies. The discrimination and marginalization they face in ballet because of their physical bodies and the work of producing and maintaining those bodies adds, as

a consequence, unique racialized and gendered forms of emotional labor that cannot be understood as separate from these embodied demands. In conclusion, as Entwistle and Wissinger (2006) argue, we must recognize the inequality produced by aesthetic labor demands in workplaces while also recognizing the emotional labor necessarily connected with these workplace demands (2006: 786).

Contrary to popular notions of a post-racial era, Black dancers still experience profoundly contrasting experiences from White individuals. This is similar to Feagin's scholarship on non-white student's experiences on college campuses in which research demonstrated how faculty, staff, administrators, and other students still commonly characterized Black and Brown underrepresented students as: academically inferior, lazy, illegal, athletes, exotic, criminals/predators, affirmative action beneficiaries, and unwilling or unable to fit into the dominant White college campus culture (Feagin, 1992; Franklin 2016). Black people have endured a great amount of emotional trauma based on their physical Black bodies. My findings document ways this continues to persist, even as Black bodies gain access to formerly and formally segregated places and spaces. The body and self at work are intertwined in ways that are challenging to make sense of when emotional and aesthetic labor are treated as discrete forms of workplace demands.

The experiences of the Black women in this study demonstrate the utility of understanding the relationships between emotional and aesthetic labor and making sense of the intersecting forms of inequality these intertwining forms of labor often work to support. Through a gendered and racialized lens, we see how and why emotional and aesthetic labor are intertwined. More specifically, it is not possible to separate the body

from self when these Black women's identities are viewed through their physical bodies. The discrimination and marginalization they face in ballet because of their physical bodies and the work of producing and maintaining those bodies adds, as a consequence, unique racialized and gendered forms of emotional labor that cannot be understood as separate from these embodied demands. In conclusion, as Entwistle and Wissinger argue, we must recognize the inequality produced by aesthetic labor demands in workplaces while also recognizing the emotional labor necessarily connected with these workplace demands (2006: 786).

Emotions and bodies in labor cannot be discussed separately because emotional labor enrolls the body just as bodies engage the mind. Throughout this chapter, I examine how women were not able to continue to perform emotional and aesthetic labor because they became emotionally depleted. The dancers could no longer cope with the discrimination because it began to impact their ability to physically perform. This led them to leave their dance company. This is significant because ballet remains a hostile workplace for Black women. I also reiterate how emotional and aesthetic labor need to go back to being discussed together. Throughout these past chapters, we see how emotional and aesthetic labor the pas are de deux of work and occupational scholarship. As mentioned in Chapter 1, occupations such as modeling, athletics, retail workers, and ballet are useful service occupations to examine because of the way that bodies are very explicitly commodified and disciplined.

The concept of the disciplined body, the body is considered to be a commodity –a form of entertainment that people pay to see. Michel Foucault describes the power of the

body in a similar way in which ballet dancers' bodies are considered. Foucault states, "The body is also directly involved in a political field… Power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault, 1975, 25) This relates to ballet in the sense that the body becomes the muse. The body is how money is being made and so the ballerinas are being tortured by "molding" their bodies to fit this unrealistic "ideal" ballerina body. The ballet dancers are carrying out this task of performing ceremonies i.e., performances/repertoires because people have invested in them and their bodies to produce art and a show. Aspiring ballet dancers at a young age are highly encouraged to 'mold' i.e., transform their body so that they will have the "ideal" body by the time they are of age to dance at a major company. The discipline that is placed on the ballet body, in some respects, relates to Foucault's perspective of the disciplined body within the penal system.

These occupations have strict (and often racialized) requirements about appearance for all workers, but more specifically for women. Many of these occupations require specific diets and exercise regimes. For women in particular, they even have to look after their skin, shave, wax or pluck bodily hair, maintain their hair, have a specific body image and dress in very specific ways. Challenging these requirements comes with consequences that shape employability within the ballet industry and unlike men women are more at stake of losing their ballet career for challenging the rigid requirements. In the following chapter, I discuss the gendered dividends and advantages that Black men experience in opposition to the gendered deficits that Black women experience within the ballet industry.

## CHAPTER 4

## ACT 3: THE MASCULINE VARIATION

*"I hope reading this edition of my memoir will give you a 'woke' moment, of what it is like to be of the white space, applauded by the whiteness of privilege, and yet be a black man, who overcame"* –Andre Leon Talley *The Chiffon Trenches* (2020)

On August 23, 2019, while in the midst of interviewing Black male participants, *Good Morning, America*'s host Lara Spencer openly laughed at the news that 6-year-old Prince George elected to study ballet. She stated, "Prince William says George absolutely loves ballet," and while laughing and looking perplexed she continued by stating, "In addition to the usual first or second grade things like math, science and history, the future king of England will be putting down the Play-Doh to take on religious studies, computer programing, poetry, and ballet, among other things," Spencer said, sparking laughter first from her co-hosts and then from Spencer herself. "He looks so happy about the ballet class," Spencer continued "I have news for you, Prince William. We'll see how long that lasts." As this comment surfaced, many dancers, overwhelmingly male, took to social media to express their distaste in Spencer's comment. It led to a handful of male dancers (predominately white) being highlighted and invited by news outlets to speak on the comment and the issues around it. As celebrity dancer and choreographer Travis Wall responds, "So Lara, I'm just giving you this: the next time you want to laugh at a child for taking a dance class or laugh at them at all, look at yourself in the mirror and ask yourself if you want to be a bully today." This then led to dozens of dancers (of all genders) gathering outside of New York City studio, taking a ballet class in the middle of Times Square, -led by Travis Wall and a few other predominately white men –with the intent to turn Lara Spencer's patronizing comment, about 6-year-old Prince George

interest in taking ballet class, into a moment to address bullying that boys in ballet are faced with. The dancers came together in solidarity to call out Spencer and use this as an opportunity to educate and bring awareness to the bullying that boys in ballet experience and to encourage boys that they can do ballet.

Unfortunately, Spencer's comment is not new, and these ideologies are still prominent today. Despite ballet being male dominated, in terms of top, decision-making and leadership roles and jobs on both the artistic and executive side, socially, ballet is still often feminized. Women encounter an occupational glass ceiling which prevents them from occupying leadership positions and so it is still controlled by men (Cless, Owton, and Allen-Collinson 2016; Christofidou 2018). As SheThePeople an Indian feminist organization posted following Spencer's comment, "Like Spencer, many people consider ballet to be a feminine dance form, suitable for girls and women. It has traits which we usually associate with femininity like poise, balance, flexibility. Ballet is synonymous with ballerinas 'prancing around' in baby pink tutus and ballet shoes. This limited understanding stereotypes not just genders, but an art form, keeping out many boys from embracing it because it is 'girly' stuff." As stated, little girls are more likely to be encouraged to join ballet (Schmalz and Kerstetter 2006). Boys and men who dance in ballet are perceived and stereotyped as effeminate and/or gay (Burt 1995; Craig 2013; Fisher 2007; Fisher and Shay 2009; Klapper 2017; Risner 2007). This cultural stereotyping steers men away from ballet as early as adolescence (Alley and Hicks 2005) and just continues the stigma.

Although the artistic vision being presented tends to be for a female-dominated audience, it is still very much male and holds patriarchal ideologies and is one of the

most gender-codified sports. Ballet re-trends sexist stereotypes and gender roles and despite one's sexuality, they are still required to perform gender roles –meaning men are required to perform a hyper, hegemonic masculinity despite their sexuality, masculinity, or gender identity. Meaning that men in ballet must negotiate their identities as men while performing a dance form that has become highly stigmatized as effeminate (Haltom and Worthen 2014).

**THE INTERSECTIONS OF MASCULINITY**

Historically, after Catherine de Medici brought ballet from Italy to France, King Louis XIV invested in court ballet and would have noblemen and professional men participate in ballet practices (Au 2012). He made ballet the ballet that we see today and from then on, majority of companies have been created and ran by men. Following the French Revolution (1789-1799) and the fall of the aristocracy, the Romantic era ballets would embody the socio-political shifts of the early 1800s. The shift to Romanticism, effected gender roles as well. Until the 1820s, the roles of men and women were on par with one another. Over the nineteenth century, ballet became perceived as inappropriate for men and in countries such as France and Britain men in ballet became highly disapproved by ballet critics and the public and so male participation began to decrease (Burt 2007; Christofidou 2018: 944). Men were minimized to support the ballerina through the tasks of lifting and supporting the ballerina in various attitudes, turns and sporadic leaps (Lozynsky, Arthem 2007) they then became needed particularly for pas de deux and ballet transformed into a profession that was predominantly practiced by women. Ballet transformed into a sphere that became mutually constitutive with women, femininity, and male effeminacy (Burt 2007; Homans 2010; Christofidou 2018). As

Novack (1993) argues how ballet reaffirms the ideologies that the United States has latched on to when it relates to the stereotypes of [white] women as being pure, delicate, and dependent on powerful men (39). Men within ballet now have to develop and negotiate their heteromasculine identities while performing ballets regardless of their personal sexual identity.

The term 'masculinity' has evolved drastically over the years especially over the last 40 years; when a small "Men's Liberation" movement began to develop in the 1970s amongst heterosexual men (Carrigan, Connell, Lee 1985) and sex-role academic research began to include the "male role" (Connell 2005). The concentration of masculinity has created a lot of conversation in understanding the different masculinities (Connell 1995) that can be performed. Connell creates a foundation for scholars to understand the various masculinities, i.e., hegemonic masculinity, marginalized masculinity, and subordinated masculinity, in order to make sense of masculinity while considering race, class, power and sexuality. From then, scholars situate masculinity within the intersectional context of race, class, sexuality, and power (Connell 2005; Staples 1978) and it is a central display of marginalization in the differing forms of masculinity (i.e., street, hyper-masculine, dominate etc.) attempt to compensate for race and class subordination (Rios and Sarabia 2016). Masculinities studies examine ways in which different ideologies of manhood are developed, changed, and contested through interactions (Bederman 1995). Kimberlé Crenshaw explains intersectionality, as a way to consider the matrix of people's overlapping identities and experiences in order to understand the complexity of prejudice they face and that are in constant relation to each other as they experience the social world (1989: 140). We see the role of intersectionality when discussing race and gender.

C.J. Pascoe examines in her book *Dude you're A Fag*, fag discourse and how it can be intreated differently amongst white boys and Black boys. Pascoe explains how certain behaviors e.g., dancing and showing interest in fashion/clothing would challenge white boys' masculinity but not Black boy's masculinity (54).

It is significant to highlight race when discussing gender because of the nuances and controlling images associated with the intersections of gender, race, and racialization. Black masculinity has been perceived as a marginalized category amongst the different masculinities (Connell 2005). Black masculinity is typically stigmatized as overtly aggressive, violent, and hypersexual beings (Staples 1978), which are considered "controlling images" that make "racism, sexism and poverty appear to be natural, normal and an inevitable part of everyday life" (Collins 1990). While these controlling images continue to stigmatize Black men negatively, scholars such as Elijah Anderson (2000) and Robert Staples deconstruct and contextualize Black masculinity and Black manhood. Anderson contextualizes Black masculinity as a complex relationship between masculinity, respect and violence that encourages young Black men to risk their lives in order to be recognized and respected as men by other men (Anderson 2000; Jones 2008). Staples states that Black masculinity is looked at in terms of white culture's normative definition of masculinity and in order to understand Black masculinity, we need to understand and analyze the experiences and complex problems that they face as being both male and Black (Staples 1982; Gary 1981). Ann Ferguson describes Black masculinity as invoking "cultural conventions of speech performance that draws on a black repertoire. Verbal performance is an important medium for black males to establish a reputation, make a name for yourself, and achieve status" (Ferguson 2001). There are a

lot of complexities to Black masculinity however, what is consistent throughout the literature is how Black masculinity is considered different more subordinate to white, heterosexual, middle/upper class masculinity i.e., hegemonic masculinity. This article contributes to the scholarship by examining how controlling images to Black masculinity provide these Black men with a racialized glass escalator. As seen in the infamous enlistment advertisement by the U.S. Army utilizing a racist and racialized image of King Kong and much more recently, *Vogue* magazine's cover shot with NBA player Lebron James depicted alongside the professional model and celebrity Giselle, we see how Black men are continuously perceived and promoted to invoke a gendered and racially violent image.

Throughout this chapter, I examine how Black men, specifically, still exert their masculinity within ballet and how Black men's experience provides an intersectional dimension in which it differs from Black women and white men.

Table 3.1 displays a breakdown of how many male ballet dancers there are amongst 13 major ballet companies across the United States. Table 3.2 displays, more specifically, how many Black male dancers there are within the 13 major ballet companies across the United States. Since this data has not been done before, I picked the top ballet companies, within each region throughout the United States, to show a collective breakdown of the racial and gendered make up of most major ballet companies.

**Table 3:1 Men in Ballet 2017-2019**

| Company | ABT[46] | Washington Ballet | NYC[2] Ballet | Boston Ballet | SF Ballet | San Diego Ballet | Los Angeles Ballet | PNW Ballet[3] | Ballet West | Houston Ballet | Joffre Ballet | Dallas Ballet | Miami Ballet |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Black men* | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| White men* | 26 | 5 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 5 | 5 | 15 | 13 | 17 | 10 | 4 | 11 |
| Total Number of men | 38 | 11 | 36 | 27 | 31 | 6 | 9 | 21 | 19 | 24 | 23 | 4 | 21 |
| Total number of dancers (men and women) | 88 | 25 | 91 | 56 | 72 | 20 | 28 | 46 | 41 | 53 | 43 | 26 | 51 |
| Percentage of men in ballet company | 43% | 44% | 40% | 48% | 43% | 30% | 32% | 46% | 46% | 45% | 53% | 15% | 41% |

*My identification for race is subjective being that I looked on each website and counted how many men were white passing and black passing. I then contacted each company for a confirmation of the amount of each dancer that identifies as either a white male or a black male.

**Table 3:2 Black Men in Ballet 2017-2019**

| Company | ABT[46] | Washington Ballet | NYC[2] Ballet | Boston Ballet | SF Ballet | San Diego Ballet | Los Angeles Ballet | PNW Ballet[3] | Ballet West | Houston Ballet | Joffrey Ballet | Dallas Ballet | Miami Ballet |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| # Of Black, male dancers | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| % Of Black male dancers to everyone in the company | 3% | 12% | 3% | 5% | 3% | 0% | 3% | 0% | 4.8% | 2% | 0% | 0% | 2% |

(These numbers are from 2017-2018 and only consider Corps de ballet, Soloist and Principal. They do not include Apprentice and retired dancers. These ballet companies were randomly selected throughout different regions of the United States.)

the tables above, show that men make up between 15-53% of ballet companies, with an average of about 40%. Being that male dancers make up about 40% within a ballet company, this challenges the stigma that ballet is predominantly for white, middle-class

women. As previously mentioned, historically, majority of companies have been created and ran by men. Therefore, the stigma of ballet being dominated by white women is not accurately supported.

While men have an equal part in participating in ballet, the percentages of Black men involved in ballet are particularly low, when looking at the percentage of men in general and then looking at the ratio of Black men in ballet, white men, on average, double if not triple the number of Black men within ballet. While looking at the tables, Black men make up less than 12% of the dancers within ballet companies across the United States. This number is exceptionally low, especially considering the fact that four out of the thirteen companies do not have Black men within the company at all. And while these numbers are exceptionally low, it is worth to note that Black men still outnumber Black women by about double the number. These low percentages and the limited amount of literature on race and ballet, signify the importance of this research.

As I will discuss, Black men, specifically, still exert their masculinity when practicing ballet in the context of football, basketball, acting, etc. however, there is very limited literature as well as Black men that perform ballet professionally. It is important to see the percentage of Black men who are professional ballet dancers and how they negotiate their masculinity within ballet.

**Dancing While Black [And Male]**

While witnessing the #BoysDanceToo phenomena I quickly noticed which men were and were not highlighted within the media coverage. Black men were not nationally visible during the interviews despite them speaking up on their own personal platforms. This made me curious about the experiences of Black men within ballet and how they

navigate controlling images and stigmas that are attached to them as Black men and the concept of Black masculinity. It also made me think about whiteness and its invisibility and intentions within many elite cultural spaces.

The invisibility of whiteness can uphold white supremacy by facilitating the cultural dominance of white experiences while also submerging explicit discussions of race. White supremacy is strengthened not only through the presence of race –race is, after all, a sociopolitical invention that ruling elites invented to justify colonialism, imperialism, genocide, slavery, capitalism, and other forms of domination and oppression (Allen, 2021; Baldwin, 1984; Said, 1979; Williams, 2019) –but also through its supposed absence. Various concepts have highlighted the power of "absence" and "neutrality" in (re)producing racism, e.g., colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) and racial ignorance (Mueller, 2020; see also Mills, 1997). These concepts highlight how individuals can reproduce racism without appearing racist –and often without ever mentioning race. Indeed, avoiding discourse is a core tactic in generating racial ignorance (Mueller 2020). This ignorance then helps its wielders and beneficiaries to secure resources associated with Whiteness while also feeling righteous and "not racist." This tactic can thus bolster white supremacy while also preserving the illusion of White virtue (see Wekker, 2016).

While understanding the discourse around whiteness, and the controlling images associated with Blackness –particularly Black men I examine the intersectional way in which Black men perform or neglect to perform emotional and aesthetic labor.

When I sat down to begin interviewing my Black male ballet participants –in which majority were via zoom and two were in person, I would ask the question, "How would you say your experience is similar to or different from Black women in ballet? And

similar and different from white men" These questions allowed me to explore the intersectional differences between not only men and women within ballet but the different experiences between Black men and Black women and Black men and white men within ballet –these questions, along with a few others allowed me to focus primarily on Black men and their accessibility within a predominantly elite, white, cultural industry.

**Manhood And Racial Dominance**

In Gail Bederman' book *Manliness and Civilization* (1995), she explores the discourse around society and its characteristic ideologies and social problems particular amongst men. Bederman examines two heavyweight champions Jim Jeffries –a popular, white heavy weight champion and Jack Johnson –the first Black world heavyweight boxing champion and how they embody and legitimate a vision of the best possible man. They do this by displaying what has always played out in American history between Black men and white men –manhood and racial dominance. In fact, society symbolized this prizefight as an indicator of which race embodies the best man. After Johnson wins the fight, we see how Black men are up against more than middle-class white men in the sense that whiteness and white privilege will always reiterate systemic racism and racist ideologies as justification for suppressing Black people. However, we also see how *inclusive masculinity* is constructed and performed racially.

Anderson (2005; 2009), Bridges (2014) and many other masculinities scholars argue that inclusive masculinity defends the ideology that the nature of men and masculinity or the *best possible man* is changing. That inclusive attitudes among men proliferate and while I will argue that whiteness still plays a significant role in gender power relations,

gender and race has a particular way of accepting manhood differently and racially within certain institutional spaces –
as Pascoe (2007) highlights.

While interviewing my male participants, I examine how Black men explain whiteness and White privilege within this space. Historically, white men have always been able to occupy this ballet space. King Louis XIV transformed ballet into the artform we experience today and for centuries Black men and Black women were unable to enter these spaces. With that being said, ballet, was created for white people and still today, we see how that whiteness continues to take precedence and benefit white men. This creates a particular emotional and aesthetic labor for Black men within ballet. Principal dancer Calvin shares his experience of being Black in ballet oppose to his white counterparts as he states,

> I feel as though there have been times where I feel like I've had to kind of prove myself or audition for things, whereas my peers that didn't look like me, but look like someone from the past that did those roles before, they just slapped them right in or fast track them in those roles and in those parts. And so, I feel like, in my experience, at ABT, in the last what I want to say, 14, 15 years since I've been involved with the company, I have seen that it takes dancers of color so much longer to rise up the ranks than it does their white counterparts.

What Calvin is describing is the whiteness and white privilege within ballet. What he is explaining, is similar to Black women both within ballet and in many other spaces that they have to work harder to be given the same opportunities as white people and this is how whiteness and white privilege operates. He also acknowledges the invisibility of whiteness as he describes how white men get the roles because they look similar to former male dances that performed this role. This is how *traditions* and whiteness continue to perpetuate exclusion and maintain racial hierarchies. Calvin was not the only

one who feels this way and shares this experience. Christopher also addresses the role that whiteness and white privilege pays as he states,

> White men are seen as having pretty legs and feet, the whole ballet world was built for them to exist in this and to be celebrated. Their look is the prince. So off the rep, just looking at the repertoire –Sleeping Beauty and all of these princey ballets it's like okay, all of these things are here for you to exist and look good whereas for me, it's like no you have to actually show us that you can do the steps, change your hair, cut your hair, do this, lose some weight, don't let your but stick out, put some fake arches in your feet, do this … you don't have 'the look'. So, they [white men] fall into praise a little easier.

Ricardo also expresses his feeling towards the white privilege that his white counterparts experience and how, like Calvin, he feels like himself and other Black men have to work even harder to be acknowledged. He states,

> I feel like White men can get away with a lot, especially in the dance world, if you are searching for the tall white men looking very mediocre, okay, and yet easily jobs can be fine. Yeah. And then for me and for my other Black counterparts, I feel like we have to work ten times more like I knew that even though I had the facility that the ballet companies wanted, I knew that I just have to be better, like work harder because I knew, like my skin would be the first thing that people see. And I knew that. Yeah, I just had to work harder.

Calvin, Christopher, and Ricardo express the role of whiteness and white privilege and how that affects their experiences within ballet. They express how historical traditions of whiteness continue to make it challenging for them to move up the rankings, within this ballet industry, at times. As Calvin states, "whereas my peers that didn't look like me, but look like someone from the past that did those roles before" and Ricardo states, "I feel like we [referring to Black men] have to work ten times more." They both are explaining how white men's experiences are amplified through the invisibility of race, since the supposed neutrality of whiteness allows for their experience to be universalized as *the* experience of men who dance (see also Moussawi and Vidal-Ortiz 2020). While

explaining whiteness and white privilege, they express how they navigate this challenge by just working harder. They do not necessarily protest working harder instead they accept it and acknowledge how white privilege operates and adjust. While white privilege is still taking place, they also express how controlling images and troupes of Black men are utilized as a form of *tokenism* to provide them with advantages that non-Black men and Black women are not able utilize.

The Black men in this study are aware that aesthetically, white men and white privilege exist especially within this predominately white cultural industry, but they never explicitly state they are excluded, they just state that they have to work harder to more up.

As Bederman shares how historical ideologies have continuously displayed the best man as White. White men have been perceived as the apex of civilization and embodying the survival of the fittest. Whiteness creates a general, historic aesthetic for men however, not everyone buys into this ideology and myth. Black people have acknowledged this ideology but continue to challenge and resist it. Black men have been able to challenge this white hegemonic ideology to benefit them and their own advantage by displaying a transformed manhood similar to Bederman's (1995) analysis. They have been able to utilize the stereotype and controlling image of being aggressive and overtly masculine to emulate the patriarchal, overtly masculine lead roles that at times, the choreographer and artistic director are requesting.

As I continue to examine, race is critical when discussing gender and we see how middle and upper-class white people continuously develop social and cultural factors to explain why they ought to exercise power, privilege, and authority.

**The Agency of Emotional and Aesthetic Labor**

As Wingfield (2009) states, “The concept of gendered racism suggests that racial stereotypes, images, and beliefs are grounded in gendered ideals (Collins 1990, 2004; Espiritu 2000; Essed 1991; Harvey Wingfield 2007)” (9). These gendered racist stereotypes align with Collins controlling images in which they attributed to the association of Black men and Black masculinity in a way that frames Black men in a particular way. Black men and Black women were both aware and shared the controlling images and troupes associated with their Blackness and the explicit racist experiences they had through roles they were asked to perform. However, Black men and Black women differ in how they navigated the emotional and aesthetic labor and their awareness of agency as they navigated the space and the racist experiences that they faced. Christopher shares an encounter when they were preparing for The Nutcracker. He states,

> As we're doing my run of party parent, I did the first entrance and the director kind of looked in, like this slightly [nods head no]. She stops the rehearsal. She calls me over. She's like, “I'm going to take you out…you know, we just didn't have interracial couples back then. And there are no Black women in the company. And like, before, when these other two Black dancers were in the company, we put them together and there was a Black kid in the school. But we don't have a Black kid in the school, so you can't even have a kid. So, it just doesn't look right, you know what I mean?” And I was like, “Yeah, yeah, sure.” So, I was fine with it. Whatever. I'm not going to be a party parent. Tough life, whatever less work to do, right? But then literally, we finished the run through, and she puts everybody on a ten-minute break. She goes upstairs, reprints the casting now I’m cast as the butler. [we make a look at one another] Yes! And it was one of those moments where it was like, oh, shit, like if I don't speak up now, this is going to be my part for the rest of my time. But if I speak up, I'm going to be the angry black guy. I'm going to be the one who's pulling the race card. But I was trained and groomed by Arthur Mitchell my whole life, so I was like, I'm ready for this. And I knocked on her door. I think I was 20 by that point, but I was like, “You think this is, OK? Like, you just thought I couldn't be in the party scene, because I'm Black and now I’m the Black butler.” And she got all like nervous. Like, you don’t have to perform it, but it's a great role to learn. Truthfully, the choreography was fabulous, but because you made it about my

race. Now I refuse to do it. I've got to learn it because I'm a good employee, and I want to set an example for all the other dancers that you learned everything and that you do it well. But I'm never going to do it because you made it about race. Fast forward, another Black guy joined. He lasted, maybe like three or four months. No, actually he did a full season before I could even get to him to tell me about my experience, they casted him as the butler. And they made him do it every single performance, mainly in The Nutcracker.

Aside from the racism that Christopher is experiencing, we also see how, similarly to Black women, he is conscious of these racialized troupes associated. He recalled that, "But if I speak up, I'm going to be the angry Black guy." But unlike Black women, Christopher doesn't care as he continues stating, "But I was trained and groomed by Arthur Mitchell my whole life, so I was like, I'm ready for this. And I knocked on her door." This demonstrates an agency and dividends that Black men have and Black women do not have. Women in general but more specifically Black women did not feel supported and were not supported when they spoke up and advocated for themselves.

Considering the patriarchal and gendered dynamic of ballet, women are silenced and told to be docile and not to take up much space. They are also told that they should be grateful to be in the space and can be replaced at any moment whereas there is a *need* for men dancers. As Robyn states, "This is what you chose to do so you have to deal with the issues. There are so many girls waiting to take your place."

Men were aware of their gender privileges, which provided them with more agency. Calvin notes that:

> I think there's this thing where there were always boys needed to do the partnering classes because the girls needed a partner. So, I think in many ways, ballet was more forgiving if maybe the guys weren't up to the same level [as the girls], because they needed the guys more.

Here, we see that Black women must are not allowed to express anger without being diminished by controlling images. Patricia Hill Collins defines this as *the sapphire*. Black

women are not only identified as the sapphire, but they are then being replaced or black balled and labeled as *difficult* to work with –which was the case for one of the women in this study who filed a lawsuit against one of the major ballet companies, she won but then was black balled from the ballet institution. Black men are not punished or deemed *difficult* when they neglect to perform emotional or aesthetic labor and the controlling images associated with Black men only enhance their desirability within ballet.

**Racial and Gendered Dividends**

Sociologist who studies gender, masculinity, and work note that jobs are sex segregated and that men and women experience certain occupations differently (Charles and Grusky 2004). Sociologist such as Adia Harvey Wingfield have contributed to Williams (1998, 1995) "glass escalator" effect –in which facilitates men's entry into better paying, higher status positions within occupations that are perceived as women's work, by not only addressing gender but race as she examines the racialization of the glass escalator. Scholars such as Bridges, Taylor, and Robison (2020), examine relationships between masculinity, work, and career and the contemporary dimensions that are connected to systems of gender inequality. While the racialization of the glass escalator is identified and examined and the power behind masculinity, work and the reproduction of gender inequalities have been explored. As Wingfield and Wingfield (2014) examine through Black male professionals, Black men experience heightened visibility in ways that are both consistent with tokenism but also a unique advantage. As we see here, Black masculinity creates upward mobility for Black men while still marginalizing Black men to controlling images.

The sociologist Raewyn Connell wrote, “The world gender order mostly privileges men over women” (1998). In her theory of gender relations, Connell conceptualized what she termed the “patriarchal dividend” to refer to the advantages that arise from gender inequality that men collect, as a group (even if some groups of men collect different amounts or to a different degree). Similarly, the Black men in my study described what I refer to as the gendered and racialized dividends they claimed to experience not despite, but because of their racially marginalized status.

This is on display when discussing Black men’s experience in ballet. Again, the Black men who participated in this study shared the same experiences of institutional racism. They also had to negotiate the stereotypes associated with Black masculinity, which was an advantage. Christopher continued his previous statement:

> But, on the flip side, I think for me, being a Black, male dancer, was what really pushed me to be a star because, I was the only Black dancer, I was the only piece of pepper in a sea of salt, so all eyes were on me, this Black man and they were like ‘wait! His technique is good. Let’s interview him. Let’s see what he’s about. And boom, that’s how it all got rolling. So, for me, I started to look at it like, okay I have an option here, am I going to let this become the thing that makes me a victim or am I going to be like yeah I’m the Black one how you doing.”

Christopher shares how he utilized his race as a form of tokenism and navigated a way to acknowledge his race but also his talents and that positioned him in a way of receiving many opportunities and advancing. Christopher is not alone when he shares how his talents were visualized and assisted him in being noticed and advancing. Sam also shares a similar experience as he states,

> I was the only Black kid in my class growing up and I was always given great roles in the shows we were learning. I don’t think it had anything to do with my race, I think it had to do with the talent and the drive that the teachers saw.

Sam shares that he feels like his opportunities were given despite his race, but more because of his talent. Him and Christopher discuss their merit and how much they worked to be talented enough for the positions that they have received and been given. Now unlike Sam but like Christopher, James also acknowledges the role of race and tokenism within his experience in the ballet institution. But like Sam, and Christopher, he continues with a similar rhetoric of also attaining great roles as he states,

> They love me, they love me, they love me, they're supporting me, they're giving me opportunities to grow. I'm leading outreach and teaching. I have all of these opportunities to grow in this career. But it was clear as day that there was still this thing [referring to him being a Black].

Christopher, Sam, and James express how they were given major roles and had opportunities. These roles and opportunities presented, resemble what Wingfield and Wingfield (2014) discuss as tokenism intersecting factors of race and gender particularly for Black professional men. Theories of tokenism have highlighted problems for minorities and aligning with the gendered dividends that Black men experience within ballet, we see how unlike women, their high numbers and heightened visibility is the primary way of avoiding gendered challenges and advancing, for men tokenism helps them advance and provides them with upward mobility (Wingfield and Wingfield 2014). Christopher, Sam, and James all demonstrate how tokenism and gendered dividends work to their advantage.

We also see this on display when Arthur Mitchell, shares the significance of his role in *Agon (1957)* pas de deux[46]*,* and why George Balanchine choreographed this particular role specifically for him. He states,

> To take a Black man and Diana –who has long legs, is very white, dark hair… I mean white skin, and to put them together [referring to his dark skin and Diana Adam's very white skin] in this very intricate pas de deux, that involves serious

> partnering and the whole secret of it is that the woman must let me do everything to her, she can't do anything by herself… and he used our skin tones as part of the choreography…He used the skin tones and also the masculine way I dance against her femininity

Arthur Mitchell and Diane Adams pas de duex performance took place within the United States in the 1950s during racial segregation and was a very controversial repertoire. While Arthur shared this with a great amount of pride, and brilliance of the choreographer in utilizing this controlling image of Black masculinity (specifically against white femininity)[46] in a way that certainly worked to his benefit to gain access to this role. Arthur describes how his performance is unique and desirable emphasizing its combination of athletics and art to masculinize his role which is similar to what Haltom and Worthen describe in their piece titled *Male Ballet Dancers and Their Performances of Heteromasculinity* (2014). While acknowledging how this role changed the course of his life, he is also describing a historical trope associated with Black masculinity too.

He recounts a controlling image with a particularly violent history in the U.S., but globally as well, and one that has been used to justify all manner of sins committed against Black men's bodies. Again, these gendered racist stereotypes of Black men and Black masculinity emphasize threatening and dangerous attributed towards White women in particular. As previously mentioned, we see how these gendered stereotypes aligns with the infamous enlistment advertisement by the U.S. Army utilizing a racist and racialized image of King Kong and the *Vogue* magazine cover shot with NBA player Lebron James depicted alongside the professional model and celebrity Giselle. The gendered tale shared by many cultural and race scholars that whiteness and femininity are viewed by American culture in which white women's bodies are culturally represented as

pure, delicate, innocent, and hyper-feminine (Dyer 1997) especially when paired with a Black man. Arthur shared how such controlling images *helped* his career, the same cultural stereotypes have a documented history of working to Black men's collective disadvantage in encounters with police, in courtrooms, and more.

All of this involved aesthetic labor and related to emotional labor as well. But while Black men in my research described controlling images as used to justify their ***inclusion*** in professional ballet, Black women discussed feeling as though controlling images made their work lives ***less*** possible and bearable. What is also being displayed is how Black men are being used and applauded by the whiteness of privilege. Arthur's Blackness was used as a statement and to draw attention to George Balanchine –a white man. It is particularly significant that Balanchine used Arthur Mitchell –a Black men to stir controversy and conversation by still marginalizing him into a controlling image while amplifying the white woman's pureness.

This reiterates Wingfield and Wingfield's discourse around Black men having a unique racialized and gendered experience within professional spaces as they acknowledge their advantages and disadvantages. Given that only a few years after, Llanchie Stevenson, now known as Aminah L. Ahmad was denied access into the same company because she would, as Balanchine stated, "break the corps color line." This not only demonstrates how controlling images produce gendered dividends, but it also reiterates what Pascoe describes as racialized fag discourse as she states, "African American men are so hypersexualized in the United States, white men are, by default, feminized, so white was a stand-in for *fag* among many of the African American boys at River High. Two of the behaviors that put a white boy at risk for being labeled a fag

[appearance and dancing] didn't function in the same way for African American boys" (71).

**Conclusion: Black Men in White Spaces**

Ballet is an extremely gender-codified sport and gender is constantly on display through classes, rehearsals, and performances. Ballet continues to hold onto these patriarchal ideologies (Kolb and Kalogeropoulou 2012), and they bring up conversations about manhood, inclusive masculinity and who is the best possible man. These gender ideologies encourage men to perform a hegemonic form of masculinity and for women, a visual ideal of "antiquated ideals of femininity[46]" (Turk 2014 p. 482) but what happens when men and women don't *fit* into these categories? Scholars Anne-Fausto-Sterling (2002), Beverly Guysheftall (2002) and Patricia Hill Collins (2000) have revealed the histories and perceptions of Black women, Black men, and their bodies as hypersexual, "naturally" athletic, masculine, animalistic and abnormal making Black women the counter-opposite of the "ideal ballerina" however, these same perceptions on Black men make them a *token* for ballet. Black men experience a form of tokenism and gendered dividends that do not reciprocate for Black women.

Black feminists pioneered what later came to be called intersectionality, in which they argued that in the lives of women, race, gender and class were inseparable (e.g., Combahee River Collective Statement, 1977). Here, I examine the intersections of race and gender overlap to construct a unique experience of advantages in addition to the challenges. laying the groundwork for intersectional analysis. Throughout this chapter, I demonstrate the ways that the experiences of Black men differ from those of women. Although they experience anti-Black racism, they understood the privileges they

possessed as men. As racial and gender tokens, they had gendered and racialized dividends. In contrast, Black women experience a racialized and gendered deficient for their stigmas and controlling images. My findings highlight the importance of examining the power of *the unsaid*. white supremacy is bolstered not only through the presence of race –race is, after all, a sociopolitical invention that ruling elites invented to justify colonialism, imperialism, genocide, slavery, capitalism, and other forms of domination and oppression (Allen 2021; Baldwin 1984; Said 1979; Williams 2019).

Although the Black men highlighted in this study expressed raced-gendered dividends, these dividends stem from racist (and sexist) controlling images of Black manhood (see Collins, 2002; Staples 1978). For centuries, controlling images of Black hypersexuality, such as the jezebel and the *mandingo,* have been used to legitimize anti-Black racism and sexism and to frame people racialized as Black as dangerous. Given cultural attachments between hypersexuality and hyper-masculinity, these controlling images also often present Blackness as hypermasculine. Although the sources and consequences of these images racist, our findings suggest that they can also produce dividends in specific, narrow settings. Nonetheless, these images are ultimately dehumanizing, and even the emergence of dividends should be understood in that context. The implication here is not simply that Black men's experiences of gender are racialized, but that in a society structured through race *all* men's experiences of gender are racialized.

While Black men may not be as explicit in sharing the emotional labor they perform, it is still demonstrated as they discuss the aesthetic labor required of them. The Black men in my study understand that they have to navigate and negotiate their Blackness with

the space and to some extent address how exhausting it can be and how they can be perceived if they challenge authority, however, unlike women, they are not as worried about the repercussions and so not experience the same repercussions as women do when they speak out. Since they know that they are needed and valued as men they use that to their advantage and do not have to exert as much emotional and aesthetic labor as Black women and when they do, it is done a little differently.

Controlling images, whiteness, racialized and gendered emotional and aesthetic labor all play a role in understanding the experiences of Black men in ballet. We see how similar to Black women, Black men are also faced with racism and controlling images but unlike Black women they are tokenism in a way that advances their career. We also see how controlling images play a role in how Black men are perceived oppose to white men and how they negotiate their emotional and aesthetic labor to navigate this white cultural space that historically favored white men. The controlling images of Black men being hyper-masculine, animalistic or the *mandingo* are applauded, valued, and are given access within this white space and while it may be tokenized and see as problematic, in the same breath, it has led to opportunities and provided representation for other Black dancers.

# CHAPTER 5

## CONCLUSION: "CURTAIN CLOSE"

> *"Black people's culture, black people's bodies, are everywhere –a constellation of attitudes-habits-predilections, the sum of which are reduced to the least common denominator by using the terms "black dance" and "black dancing body"."*
>
> *-Brenda Dixon Gottschild*

On Friday, November 10, 2017, at 1pm I met with Aesha at the La Quinta Inns and Suites in San Jose, California –which is the city she was currently living in, with her husband and two children. She walked in with her two children. Her son who at the time was 5 years old and her daughter, who is a few years older. She walked in with hair was in a bun and casual attire. I remember how in awe I was to be sitting in front of her since she was the only Black ballerina I knew of, and I always admired. I always admired her beauty and movement and how she carried herself with, what it appeared to be, such confidence. As we sat there and we talked, and laughed, and shared stories, we were moving towards the end of the interview, and I remember she began to share the feeling of dancing and what being in the studio and what dancing ballet meant to her. She stated,

> You get in that studio and just get lost. And it's the place where you come alive, and you feel alive, and you feel like you can be fully present. That voice inside of you can finally sing. Yet, when you're a minority, it's different. There's still something holding you back because you don't know if you're 100 percent accepted, even in an artistic environment. You find yourself quieting down and making yourself smaller in a space that is demanding you to perform and be the center of attention. Therein lies heaviness and weight.

After she shared this, I remember I then asked her, as we were concluding the interview, why didn't she want to utilize her platform in a bigger way. She laughed and said that she had a close friend that asked her the same question. While getting ready to answer the question, Aesha turned to her daughter, which was sitting on the couch

looking at her, and politely asked her to turn around and look the other way. She then turned back to me and said that she never wanted her daughter to hear her talk about how insecure she was. She then proceeded to me about how terrifying it was for her to be in the iconic ballet movie that she was in during the early 2000s. She said, "it felt like someone just ripped her clothes off and made her stand in the middle of a crowd of people." She proceeded to tell me how insecure ballet has made her, and she became so emotional as she was telling me this. I remember I sat there in disbelief. Here I was sitting in front of a former Black ballerina –who I always admired and felt was as close to perfect and confident as anyone could be. I watched her as she spoke and I could see the vulnerability, the hurt and the brokenness, from the constant criticism and racism, she experienced throughout her ballet experience. At that moment, I realized the deep cuts and wounds that ballet has caused, not just to her but to me and many other Black ballerinas as well. "To love an artform that doesn't love you back" one of my participants expressed.

Throughout the interview, Aesha also shared the non-profit work that she is currently doing and how it connects back to her experience and the importance of representation. She states:

> I chose to use photography [as her current ballet project] because I had this picture of Drea in the dormitory at School of American Ballet and I remember seeing her in that classroom setting, and being the only one in that group of girls, the only Black girl and I would look at that whenever I was super low and was like you know what I can't do this and then I would look like okay, Drea said I can do it, I can do it. I remember, once I was finally promoted from the school to the company, I would see her. I was intimidated by her because she was senior core right and I was just an apprentice and I remember her calling me over and she was like, "Come here!" and I remember one time she called me over to her dressing room and she was like, "How's it going? You need to get up there!" and I was like I can't because I was very shy and very insecure and she was like, "Get up there. Get to the front of the room." And I was thinking like if she was in the

> company my entire career that would have changed everything for me. Having someone there as my cheerleader like that. Someone who had been there. Someone who's a *Black woman* because that makes a difference. I had Black male friends but it's different. Their struggle in ballet is just different. It's just completely different.

She continues,

> If I would have had that strength from her my entire career. I mean it was like a big sister that was just like girl wipe that insecurity away, get your butt up there in the front of the room and dance. I better not see you hiding back her again. Like I needed that. But I just had it for a short time. So, that was *really* important for me to have her there. It was huge. It was really *really* huge.

Black dancers are constantly battling with acceptance within this historically white elite spaces and representation and support has been very limited but very critical for many Black ballet dancers. The limited representation and pushout culture, from gatekeepers, made it difficult to maintain Black dancers' retention within these spaces. As we saw in chapter 3, Robyn, Andrea, Llanchie (Aminah) and Raven Wilkinson all address the racial fatigue they experienced, and how it creates isolation, fatigue and a nonacceptance that leads Black dancers to other dance forms or out of dance completely. We were able see Black women who danced professionally experience racial fatigue, but we see it significantly with Black women who did not make it professionally. Throughout this research journey, I have encountered and interacted with a great number of Black women who have said that they've either always wanted to do ballet or did ballet but did not make it into a school or company. They would say things such as "I always wanted to do ballet, but I didn't think it was for me" or "I used to do ballet, but I stopped." These comments and conversations and my own personal experience led me to exploring the *pushout* that Black women experience within ballet.

*The Pushout*

Many scholars have addressed the concept of Black and Brown people being pushed out of White spaces. Monique W Morris (2016) discusses how Black girls are policed and punished by policies and practices that label them as socially deviant in ways that disregard their individuality, criminalize their culture, and delegitimize their experiences, thus channeling them to school-to confinement pathways. Morris (2016) delineates how Black girls are considered disruptive for having the audacity to talk back to authority, reinforcing the stereotypical label of the *Black girl attitude.* Black boys also face racially gendered policing in schools, being disproportionally suspended, arrested, and kicked out (Ferguson 2000). Many Black women described being pushed out, nudged out, and kicked out of ballet in more explicit ways. Andrea states:

> I've heard white teachers take a very talented Black student, and I'm not saying names, "You would be fabulous in [particular modern/contemporary companies]." Really? Why are you already stunting this child's growth.

Krystal shares an experience about ballet being her "plan A" and how that changed as she got older. She states:

> I felt like, okay, ballet is what I want to do. I don't want to do anything else. So that was like my plan A, so I had a dream, to be a black ballerina. And at the time, I didn't think there would be any obstacles or anything to stop me from achieving that. I would say maybe around 14 or 15, this is really what I want to do. I know there are other options, but this is what I want to do. So, at 17, my dance teacher took me to an audition at a Black modern company for a summer program and I made it. At that point, I was like this is my future even though it was modern.

Krystal shares how her dance teacher took her to her to an audition for a predominately Black modern company and after that experience, her plan of getting into a ballet company shifted. She doesn't explicitly explain why, but it is worth noting that her dance teacher took her to this audition, despite her being a ballet dancer. This Lauryn shares

how her self-consciousness and self-esteem was the reason for her transitioning out of ballet despite having a true passion and love for ballet.

> I enjoyed ballet. I would say that my top two were modern and ballet like I enjoy them both. I think that I got more self-conscious when it came to ballet. So, I think I kind of started to ease away from it. But that was always my foundation. So, I always had that love for it.

As Krystal and I further unpacked why she felt self-conscious about ballet after a while, she shared that a lot of it was because her understanding of Black people not being welcomed within the space and her body image. She expressed how she felt more comfortable in modern and how she saw more Black dancers in modern.

Serenity explains how she was also encouraged to pursue modern dance and states,

> I studied all origins of dance and modern, really comes in a really peculiar place, and I just was thinking about it earlier today, I'm like, it was intentionally created to move us [Black people] out of the way and create and so that we'd have our own space, and we could do what we want and not bother them and not change what they have going on.

Dance forms such as modern, contemporary, and hip hop are dance forms that are very inclusive and embody diversity. So much so that many of my participant share how at one point in their dance trajectory they were told that they would be of *better fit* in any of these style of dances as a way of *pushing them out* of ballet. As Clabaugh and Morling state,

> This population constitutes a culture because dancers share a way of life that involves intense physical training, immersion in their art, and a career path that has little chance for success according to one analysis, fewer than 5% of preprofessional dance students ever perform on the professional stage; Schnitt & Schnitt, 1988) [and within this 5%, only 5% of these professionals are Black women]. Most preprofessional dancers have training in both ballet and modern dance. However, ballet and modern dancers are distinct subgroups within dance culture (2004: p.32).

Stereotypes are people's beliefs about a social group that are typically created from negative and exaggerated biases (Allport 1954; Katz and Braly 1933). These stereotypes take place within dance subgroups. Ballet has been categorized as the "core" and "standard" of dance so much that many modern dancers start out in ballet and then transition to modern (Clabaugh and Morling 2004) and so anecdotally and stereotypically, ballet dancers may view a modern dancer as "a dancer who just couldn't make it in ballet" (Sharp 2008). While understanding ballet and dance, it is worth noting that "dance group membership is an acquired (rather than ascribed) status" and requires a rigid training atmosphere and elitist aesthetic standards particularly within ballet (Bakker 1991) which are embedded in whiteness and white privilege.

**Conclusion: The Final Curtain Call**

Ballet requires a disciplinary power for all ballet dancers in which they navigate and practice technologies of self. In general women's requirements are a lot more rigorous as the men who I have interviewed, in chapter 4, would attest to. However, it is important to acknowledge that Black women have an additional racialized requirement. Black women are forced to attain a beauty requirement that is structured and favored towards white women and is presented as "mainstream" beauty requirements. As Strings (2019) and many other scholars have addressed these beauty requirements are not universal and again not favored for anyone that does not fit the affluent White woman mold.

It is also important to move away from the monolithic stories and ideologies associated with Black dancers and to express the complexities within Black dancers' experiences. There is something significant behind the Black dancers who have made it

within the space as was addressed when discussing gatekeeping, social, cultural, and economic capital.

Not every Black dancer interviewed has experienced or shared a significant traumatic or blatant racist experience. It is important to acknowledge this and highlight the complexities of Black dancers despite how gatekeepers perceive and stigmatize Black dancers. While Black ballet dancers are not a monolith, they experience similar racist comments and discriminatory comments because gatekeepers address majority of Black people the same despite their differences. As highlighted, there are Black dancers who do have the ideal body type or can perform a particular role but instead of being acknowledged as an individual and given the history of racism and white supremacy, within cultural spaces such as ballet, gatekeepers address black dancers as the same. It is particularly interesting how certain generations navigate their experience in ballet and shared their experience in ballet. Overall, all my participants acknowledged racism within ballet however, there were very few generational differences in the stories shared and the opinions on ballet in the future. The topics were typically around aesthetics on social media and the use of social media and ballet more generally and for the younger generation the influence of Misty Copeland as their reference point. Many younger dancers mentioned how Misty Copeland influenced them. As one dancer states while discussing her body,

> I think it's a mental issue for me to aim for that Misty [Copeland] Body. That nice muscular, lean lengthiness because that's what a ballerina does encompass.

Here we see the effect of representation and for people of a previous generation, that representation was not as accessible as previously shared by Aesha, “Someone who’s a *Black woman* because that makes a difference.”

Building upon the research of Wingfield (2010) and others examining the workplace intersectionally, my data shows how Black professional dancers performed racialized forms of gendered emotional and aesthetic labor in at least three specific ways. First, Black dancers were assigned roles reinforcing racial stereotypes and con- trolling images—specifically the Black jezebel. To succeed in ballet, the women in this study discussed being in demanding routines structured by racialized and gendered forms of aesthetic labor.

Second, Black women were fetishized in dance companies. They were forced to conform to a required “look” and required to move their body within both their technique classes and the repertoires they perform on stage in ways that reinforced stereotypes that support racial hierarchies and inequality. They described in detail the additional labor they felt compelled to endure to attempt to find ways of existing in ballet and appeasing employers and audiences while also using it defensively to hide their actual feelings.

Third, an analysis of how racialized and sexualized discrimination structured their emotional, aesthetic, and cultural performances shows that ballet companies remain hostile workplaces for Black women. Indeed, many of the participants in my study who had been dancing at elite levels for sustained periods of time described similar points at which the emotional costs associated with the racialized and gendered aesthetic demands were too great for them to continue to perform. The racial fatigue led many to leave their dance company. Having to read audience critics write things such as “It’s so disturbing

seeing a line of girls and one Black Body" as was the case for Aesha, and having it hurt but continuing to push through despite the pain and racial fatigue, it becomes unbearable at some point and for years, dancers did not have much support and outlets are current dancers are starting to become more expose to and aware of. Social media platforms such as Brown Girls Do Ballet, allow representation and support for many Black and Brown dancers as a place to connect and support one another. However, it still does not negate the fact that Black and Brown dancers *need* this support because of the racism, marginalization and discrimination still being faced within ballet.

Work and occupations, such as ballet, are gendered, raced, classed, and embodied. Ballet has been an exclusive, White elite space that mirrors history in that it is perceived through a dominant white culture which has ignored, marginalized, and excluded Black bodies. Like a great deal of culture in the United States, American ballet was highly influenced by Black culture and Blackness and has been stolen and appropriated by white Americans while Black people remain devalued and excluded. George Balanchine—one of the pioneers of American ballet in the mid-1930s—was heavily influenced by Black culture but supported strict embodied forms of aesthetic labor for women that came to characterize "the ballerina" more generally (i.e., pre-pubescent, pure, elegant). Such an image worked in ways that further excluded Black women from ballet. Alongside this, historical "controlling images" of Black women as curvaceous, sexualized, and impure (e.g., Collins 1990) worked to systematically exclude Black women from ballet.

Social stratification scholars historically, have focused on studying poverty oppose to affluence. More recently, cultural sociologists have turned their attention to the persistence of privilege. Many scholars have focused specifically on schooling and the

illuminated ways in which affluent and well-educated parents pass advantages that give their children a competitive edge or a particular form of capital (Rivera 2016). As Krane et. al states, “Cultural studies scholars examine common practices that shape all aspects of social life (Frow & Morris, 2000). They focus on how these practices are socially constructed, how they create cultural meanings, and their role in establishing differential power and privileged in society” (Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar and Kauer 2004). Throughout Ch. 2, I acknowledged and engaged how parents’ capital may have created an opportunity for Black professional dancers to network and situate themselves in spaces to be noticed within ballet, it is still the gatekeepers and the racialized barriers that ultimately shaped many, not *all*, of the Black dancers’ experiences. Throughout this paper, focus on predominately white affluent cultural spaces and the experiences of Black people within in.

I examine how whiteness white privilege and white supremacy creates commonalities amongst Black people’s experience and how it is used to gatekeep and prevent Black people from occupying these spaces comfortably. As Aesha states:

> Society is not seeing Black women as a ballerina and what a ballerina represents. So, there are a lot of advancements that society as a whole needs to make. We have to change societies views on women of color and translate it into ballet because when we get into a ballet company, we get time casted as if we can only play the exotic roles, the modern roles, the witch, the Arabian, the sorceress, something dark, something more tribal and that angers me. We do it and we do it well but that’s not all we do. Just like there are other dancers that can flip flop roles. So, can we…it’s like that because that is how we are viewed before we even reach the ballet studio and that is the issue. Before we even reach the studio, we get seen by what people see on the screen; something exotic, something modern, something tribal, something overly sexualized and that drives me nuts… We are sensitive, we are caring, we cry, we are vulnerable, we are all of these things and I wanted to push that heavily. And so, it was very important to me to always maintain this classical image and this classical presence because that was exactly what they didn’t expect to happen.

## REFRENCES: THE CREDITS

AFP. 2017. US Fashion World Ask: Where are all the Black Designers? Fashion Network. Retrieved from https://us.fashionnetwork.com/news/Us-fashion-world-asks-where-are-all-the-black-designers-,790983.html

Adair, Christy. 1992. *Women and Dance: Sylphs and Sirens*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Allport, G. W. 1954. *The nature of prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Addison Wesley.

Anderson, Eric. 2005. Orthodox and inclusive masculinity: Competing masculinities among heterosexual men in a feminized terrain. *Sociological Perspectives, 48*, 337–355.

Anderson, Eric D., 2009. The maintenance of masculinity among the stakeholders of sport. *Sport management review*, *12*(1), pp.3-14.

Avila, Eric, and Mark H. Rose. 2009. "Race, Culture, Politics, and Urban Renewal." Journal of Urban History 35:335–47.

https://blog.balletaz.org/ballet-101-pas-de-deux-breakdown/

Bakker, F. C. 1991. Development of personality in dancers: A longitudinal study. *Personality and Individual Differences, 12,* 671–681.

Banks, Ingrid. 2000. *Hair matters: Beauty, power, and black women's consciousness*. NYU Press

Banks, Patricia A. 2010. "Black Cultural Advancement: Racial Identity and Participation in the Arts among the Black Middle Class." Ethnic & Racial Studies 33:272–89.

Benois, Alexandre. 1941. *Reminiscences of the Russian Ballet*. New York: Da Capo Press.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2006. *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

______________. 1989. "Social Space and Symbolic Power." Sociological Theory 7:14–25.

______________. 1993. The Field of Cultural Reproduction. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Bridges, Tristan. 2014. A very 'Gay' straight? Hybrid masculinities, sexual aesthetics, and the changing relationship between masculinity and homophobia. *Gender and Society, 28*, 58–82.

Brown, Lauren Erin. 2018. "As Long as They Have Talent": Organizational Barriers to Black Ballet, Dance Chronicle, 41:3, 359-392.

Burt, Ramsay. 1995. *The male dancer. Bodies, spectacle, sexualities*. London: Routledge.

Byrd, Ayana D., & Lori L. Tharp. 2002. Hair story: Unlocking the roots of Black hair in America

Carmen, Joseph. 2014. "Behind Ballet's Diversity Problem." Pointe Magazine. Retrieved from https://www.pointemagazine.com/behind-ballets-diversity-problem-2412811909.html

Childress, Clayton and Jean-François Nault. 2019. Encultured Biases: The Role of Products in Pathways to Inequality. American Sociological Review 84(1): 115-141.

Christofidou, Andria. 2018. Men of dance: negotiating gender and sexuality in dance institutions. Journal of Gender Studies, 27:8, 943-956.

Claytor, Cassi Pittman. 2020. "Black Privilege." *Black Privilege*. Stanford University Press.

Clabaugh, Alison, & Beth Morling. 2004. Stereotype accuracy of ballet and modern dancers. *The Journal of social psychology*, *144*(1), 31-48.

Clegg, H., Owton, H., & Allen-Collinson, J. (2016). The cool stuff!: Gender, dance, and masculinity. *Psychology of Women Section Review, 18*, 6–16.

Collins, Patricia Hill.1990. "Black feminist thought in the matrix of domination." *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* 138, no. 221-238.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2002. Black feminist thought. New York: Routledge.

Collins, Patricia Hill, and Sirma Bilge. 2020. *Intersectionality*. John Wiley & Sons.

Connell, Raewyn. (1995/2005). *Masculinities* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Cooper, Anna J. 1892. *A Voice from the South* (reprinted in 1998).

Craig, Maxine Leeds. 2002. Ain't I a Beauty Queen? Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race. New York: Oxford University Press.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1995. *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. The New Press.

__________________ 1989. Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine. University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989: 139–168

Currid, Elizabeth. 2007. *The Warhol Economy: How Fashion, Art, and Music Drive New York City*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Daly, Ann. 1987/1988. 'Classical Ballet: A Discourse of Difference', *Women & Performance*, Vol. 3(2) 57–66.

DeLongoria, Maria. 2018. Misogynoir: * Black hair, identity politics, and multiple black realities. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, *12*(8), 39-49.

DeSante, Christopher D. 2013. Working Twice as Hard to Get Half as Far: Race, Work Ethic, and America's Deserving Poor. American Journal of Political Science 57(2), 342-356.

DiMaggio, Paul, and Francie Ostrower. "Participation in the arts by black and white Americans." *Social Forces* 68, no. 3 (1990): 753-778.

Dorothy L. Schmalz & Deborah L. Kerstetter (2006) Girlie Girls and Manly Men: Chidren's Stigma Consciousness of Gender in Sports and Physical Activities, Journal of Leisure Research, 38:4, 536-557.

Dworkin, Shari L. & Faye L. Wachs. 2004. “Getting your Body Back”: Postindustrial Fit Motherhood in Shape Fit Pregnancy Magazine. *Gender & Society*, *18*(5), 610–624.

DuBois, W. E. B. 1926. “Criteria of Negro Art.” *The Crisis*, 32: 290-297.

Dyer, Richard. 1997. *White*. London and New York: Routledge. Print.

Entwistle, Joanne. 2002. "The Aesthetic Economy: The Production of Value in the Field of Fashion Modelling." *Journal of Consumer Culture* 2:317-339.

Franklin, Jeremy. 2016. "Racial microaggressions, racial battle fatigue, and racism-related stress in higher education." *Journal of Student Affairs at New York University* 12.44: 44-55.

Ferguson, Ann Arnett. 2000. *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*.

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Fisher, Jennifer. 2018. Op-Ed: ‘Yellowface’ in ‘The Nutcracker’ isn’t a benign ballet tradition, it’s racist stereotyping. Los Angeles Times. https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-fisher-nutcracker-chinese-dance-revisionism-20181211-story.html

Foucault, Michel. 1975. "Discipline and punish." *A. Sheridan, Tr., Paris, FR, Gallimard*.

Frow, John, and Meaghan Morris. 2000. "Cultural Studies. Handbook of Qualitative Research. NK Denzin and YS Lincoln."

Gard, M. 2008. When a boy’s gotta dance: New masculinities, old pleasures. Sport, Education, and Society 13: 181–93.

Garafola, Lynn. 1985. “The Travesty Dancer in Nineteenth-Century Ballet.” *Dance research journal* 17.2: 35–40. Web.

Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. 2008. “Yearning for Lightness: Transnational Circuits in the Marketing and Consumption of Skin Lighteners.” Gender & Society 22 (3):281–302. doi:10.1177/0891243208316089.

Gruys, Kjerstin. 2012.“Does this make me look fat?: Aesthetic labor and fat talk as emotional labor in a women's plus-size clothing store.” *Social Problems* 59(4): 481-500.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.

Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Gottschild Brenda Dixon. 1996. *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance Dance and other Context*. Greenwood Press: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc. 1996

________________ 2016. *The black dancing body: A geography from coon to cool*. Springer.

Golden, Emma D. 2018. From Troupes to Troupes: misty Copeland and the Hyper-Whiteness of Ballet. Student Publications. 700. https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship/700?utm_source=cupola.gettysburg.edu%2Fstudent_scholarship%2F700&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages

Gualtieri, Gillian. 2021. Discriminating Palates: Evaluation and Ethnoracial Inequality in American Fine Dining. Social Problems.

Haltom, Trenton M. and Meredith G.F. Worthen. 2014. Male Ballet Dancers and Their Performances of Heteromasculinity. Journal of College Student Development 55:8, 757-778.

Harrell, Shelly P. 2000. A multidimensional conceptualization of racism related stress: Implications for the well-being of People of Color. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 70*(1), 42-57.

Hayes, Heather. 2021. "Ballet West Breaks the Continuous Line." Saltlake Magazine. Retrieved from https://www.saltlakemagazine.com/ballet-west-breaks-the-continuous-line/

Homans, J. 2010. *Apollo's angels: A history of ballet*. Great Britain: Granta.

hooks, bell. 2004. We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity. New York and London:Routledge.

Hull, Gloria T., Akasha Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds. 1982. *All the women are white, all the blacks are men, but some of us are brave: Black women's studies*. Feminist Press.

Jackson, La'Toya Princess. 2019. Black Swans Shattering the Glass Ceiling: A Historical Perspective the Evolution of Historically Black Ballet Companies— From Katherine Dunham to Arthur Mitchell. Master's thesis, Harvard Extension School.

Johnson, Pamela., & Juliette Harris. (Eds.). 2001. *Tenderheaded: A comb-bending collection of hair stories*. Simon and Schuster

Kang, Miliann. 2003. "The Managed Hand: The Commercialization of Bodies and Emotions in

Korean Immigrant–owned Nail Salons." *Gender & Society* 17, no. 6: 820-839.

___________. 2010. The Managed Hand. In *The Managed Hand*. University of California Press.

Katz, D., & Braly, K. 1933. Racial stereotypes of one hundred college students. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 28,* 280–290.

Keivom, James. 2015.Searching for the next "Misty": Why black ballerinas are in such short supply. Retrieved from https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/finding-misty-black-ballerinas-rare-article-1.2288544

Khan, Shamus. 2011. *Privilege: The making of an adolescent elite at St. Paul's School*. Vol. 56. Princeton University Press.

Krane, Vikki, Precilla YL Choi, Shannon M. Baird, Christine M. Aimar, Kerrie J. Kaure. 2004. Living the paradox: female athletes negotiate femininity and muscularity. *Sex Roles,* 50, 315- 329.

Howard, Theresa. 2018. Is Classical Ballet Ready to Embrace Flesh-Tone Tights? Dance Magazine. Retrieved October 16, 2020. (https://www.dancemagazine.com/ballet-flesh-tone-tights-2612825762.html?rebelltitem=1).

Lansky, Chava Pearl. Remembering Raven Wilkinson, Trailblazing Ballerina. Pointe Magazine. 2018. https://www.pointemagazine.com/remembering-raven-wilkinson-trailblazing-black-ballerina-2623864149.html

Laurens, Cammille. 2017. Little Dancer Aged Fourteen. New York: Other Press.

Levine, Ally J. 2021. The secret to “The Nutcracker’s” success. https://graphics.reuters.com/USA-CHRISTMAS/NUTCRACKER-BALLET/jnvweaomdvw/

Lobenthal, Joel. 2013. "A Conversation with Betty Nichols.": 56-60.

Majors, Richard and Mancini Billson, Janet. 1992. *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*. New York: Lexington Books.

McIntosh, Peggy. 2001. “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.” Pp. 20–31 in Race, Class, and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study, edited by P. Rothenberg. New York, NY: Worth Publishers.

Mears, Ashley. 2011. "Pricing Beauty." In *Pricing Beauty*. University of California Press.

Mills, C. Wright. 1951."The New Middle Class, I." *The New Middle Classes*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. 189-202.

Milton, Trevor B. 2012. "Class status and the construction of Black masculinity." *Ethnicity and Race in a Changing World* 3, no. 1: 17-31.

Misra, Joya, and Kyla Walters. 2022. *Walking Mannequins: How Race and Gender Inequalities Shape Retail Clothing Work*. Univ of California Press.

Morris, Monique. 2016. *Pushout: The criminalization of Black girls in schools*. The New Press.

Moussawi, Ghassan, and Salvador Vidal-Ortiz. 2020. "A queer sociology: On power, race, and decentering whiteness." In *Sociological Forum*, vol. 35, no. 4, pp. 1272-1289.

Mueller, Jennifer C. 2020. "Racial ideology or racial ignorance? An alternative theory of racial cognition." *Sociological Theory* 38, no. 2: 142-169.

Newman, Joshua I. 2007. "Army of Whiteness? Colonel Reb and the Sporting South's Cultural and Corporate Symbolic." Journal of Sport & Social Issues 31:315–39.

Newman, Scarlett L. 2017. "Black Models Matter: Challenging the Racism of Aesthetics and the Facade of Inclusion in the Fashion Industry." *CUNY Academic Works.*

Nguyen, Mimi Thi. 2011. "The Biopower of Beauty: Humanitarian Imperialisms and Global Feminisms in an Age of Terror." Signs 36 (2):359–83. doi:10.1086/655914.

Novack, Cynthia. 1993. *Ballet, Gender, and Cultural Power*. Dance, Gender, and Culture, ed. Helen Thomas. London: MacMillan, 1993. Print.

Okanlawon, Alexander.1972. *Africianism –A Synthesis of the African World-View*. Black World 21(9): 40-44,92-97.

Ostrander, Susan A.1993. "“Surely you're not in this just to be helpful” Access, Rapport, and Interviews in Three Studies of Elites." *Journal of contemporary Ethnography* 22.1: 7-27.

Pascoe, Cheri J., 2011. *Dude, you're a fag*. University of California Press.

Pattillo-McCoy, Mary. E. 1999. *Black picket fences: Privilege and peril among the Black middle class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Patton, Tracey Owens. 2006. Hey Girl, Am I More than My Hair?: African American Women and Their Struggles with Beauty, Body Image, and Hair. *NWSA Journal, 18*(2), 24-51. Retrieved April 14, 2021, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/4317206

Pettinger, Lynne. 2004."Brand culture and branded workers: Service work and aesthetic labour in fashion retail." *Consumption Markets & Culture* 7, no. 2: 165-184.

Picart, Caroline Joan S. 2011. "A Tango between Copyright and Choreography: Whiteness as Status Property in Balanchine's Ballets, Fuller's Serpentine Dance and Graham's Modern Dances." *Cardozo JL & Gender* 18: 685.

Pierce, Chester. 1970. Offensive mechanisms. In F. B. Barbour (Ed.), The Black seventies (pp. 265- American Faculty and Graduate Students at Predominately White Institutions. New York: Peter Lang Publishers pp. 171- 190.

Polasek, Katherine M. and Emily A Roper. 2011. Negotiating the gay male stereotype in ballet and modern dance. Research in Dance Education 12:2 173-193.

Pollard, Sam. 2021. Black Art: In the Absence of Light. HBO.

Ray, Rashawn. 2017. "Black people don't exercise in my neighborhood: Perceived racial composition and leisure-time physical activity among middle class blacks and whites." *Social science research* 66: 42-57.

Rivera, Lauren A. 2012. “Hiring as Cultural Matching: The Case of Elite Professional Service Firms.” *American Sociological Review* 77(6):999–1022.

________________. 2016. "Pedigree." In *Pedigree*. Princeton University Press.

Risner, D. 2009. Stigma and perseverance in the lives of boys who dance: An empirical study of male identities in western theatrical dance training. Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press.

Roberts, Millie. 2019. The Australian Ballet’s Nutcracker tones down the yellowface - and it’s a relief. The guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/dec/04/the-australian-ballets-nutcracker-tones-down-the-yellowface-and-its-a-relief

Robinson, Sekani. 2021."BLACK BALLERINAS: The Management of Emotional and Aesthetic Labor." Sociological Forum. 36:2.

Rooks, Noliwe M.1996. *Hair raising: Beauty, culture, and African American women*. Rutgers University Press

Said, Edward W. 1979. *Orientalism*. Vintage.

Salvatto, Gabrielle. 2021. Dancing While Black: 8 Pros on How Ballet Can Work Toward Racial Equity. Retrieved from https://www.dancemagazine.com/black-dancers-ballet-2649796767.html?rebelltitem=1#rebelltitem1

Schnitt, J. M., & Schnitt, D. 1988. Psychological aspects of dance. In P. M. Clarkson & M. Skrinar (Eds.), *The science of dance training* (pp. 239–267). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Books.

Sharp, Adrienne. 2008. *White swan, black swan: Stories*. Ballatine Books. New York: Random House.

Smith, William A. 2004. Black faculty coping with racial battle fatigue: The campus racial climate in a post-civil rights era. New York: Peter Lang Publishers pp. 171-190.

Smith, William A. 2009a. Campus wide climate: Implications for African American students. In L. Tillman (Ed.), *A handbook of African American education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications pp. 297-309.

Smith, William A. 2009b. Higher education: Racial battle fatigue. In R. T. Schaefer (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of race, ethnicity, and society.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications pp. 615-618.

Staples, Robert. 1982. *Black Masculinity: The Black Male's Role in American Society*. San Francisco, CA: The Black Scholar Press.

Strings, Sabrina. 2019. *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia.* NYU Press.

Strings, Sabrina, Irene Headen, and Breauna Spencer. 2019."Yoga as a technology of femininity: Disciplining white women, disappearing people of color in Yoga Journal." *Fat Studies* 8.3: 334-348.

Swartz, David. 1997. Culture & Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

The Official CROWN Act. https://www.thecrownact.com

Wacquant, Loïc J. D. 2004. *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Warhurst, Chris, and Dennis Nickson. 2001. *Looking Good, Sounding Right: Style Counselling and the Aesthetics of the New Economy*. London: London: Industrial Society.

Warhurst, Chris, Dennis Nickson, Anne Witz, and Anne Marie Cullen. 2000. "Aesthetic Labour in Interactive Service Work: Some Case Study Evidence from the "New" Glasgow." *Service Industries Journal* 20:1-18.

Watts, Eric. 2001. Cultivating a Black Public Voice: W.E.B. Du Bois and the "Criteria of Negro Art." Michigan State University Press. Rhetoric and Public Affairs: 4(2) 181-201.

Williams, C. L., & Connell, C. 2010. "Looking good and sounding right" aesthetic labor and social inequality in the retail industry. *Work and Occupations 37*(3): 349-377

Williams, Laura. 1998. A Legacy of Dance in Harlem Over 50 Yrs., Teacher Hasn't Missed A Step. New York Daily News. Retrieved from https://www.nydailynews.com/legacy-dance-harlem-50-yrs-teacher-hasn-missed-step-article-1.792231

Wingfield, Adia Harvey. 2010. "Are some emotions marked 'whites only': Racialized feeling rules in professional workplaces. *Social Problems* 57(2):251-268.

Wingfield, Adia Harvey, and John Harvey Wingfield. 2014. "When visibility hurts and helps: How intersections of race and gender shape Black professional men's experiences with tokenization." *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 20, no. 4: 483.

Witz, A., Chris Warhurst, and Dennis Nickson. 2003. "The Labour of Aesthetics and the Aesthetics of Organization." *Organization* 10:33-54.

Wolkowitz, Carol. 2006. *Bodies at Work*. London: SAGE.

## APPENDIX A: Open Audition: Methodological Notes

I started ballet at the age of three. I was one of the only Black girls in the class and that never changed as the years went by. Fast forward to seventh grade, I had a dream about a Black ballerina. In my dream, I couldn't see the ballerina's face, but she had dark skin and curly hair like mine. This dream led me to write a poem about this mysterious dancer, for an English class assignment (that my dad framed and keeps with him today). The poem started with, "This beautiful Black dancer dances to hide her tears. She dances to hide her fears. She dances to forget her anger and sorrow… I don't know who this Black dancer is but she's dancing to help make the community grow." After writing the poem, I realized that despite having studied ballet since I was three years old, I had never actually seen a ballerina on stage that looked like me, and so I began a journey to find her.

I searched online and came across an article with a picture of Aesha Ash –a graceful and elegant Black ballet dancer wearing a beautiful orange costume. The title of the article was "Where Are All the Black Swans" by Gia Koulas for the New York Times. It criticized major ballet companies for their lack of diversity; specifically, their lack of Black women in ballet. My dream, my poem and this research sent me on a ballet voyage. Thirteen years later, I am still filling in the gaps of where all the Black dancers reside within the canon of ballet and ballet history. Black dancers and creatives have contributed to many aspects of the artform. This research traces my investigation of the history of culture as it pertains to the conflict of diversity and elitism in the world of ballet.

### *Positionality, Reflexivity and Accessing Elite Populations*

While conducting this research, I realized how important my positionality was in both gaining access and collecting stories from my participants. As a Black woman, who has practiced ballet and who now works for an organization called Brown Girls Do Ballet in addition to working with American Ballet Theatre's Summer Intensive program, I gained access to the dancers —it has also afforded me a connection with my participants and generated trust that provided a privileged insight into our shared professional experiences. Our shared experiences allow for a fundamental element of an Afrocentric standpoint (Okanlawon 1972) in which "Black people share a common experience of oppression" (Okanlawon 1972) which again, allowed for a more candid conversation between me and the participants in which other people may not have been able to accomplish.

These positions provided me from access to dancers and allowed me to engage in conversations that would have been difficult for those outside of the industry. We were able to have candid discussions as women who had shared experiences in the industry. I remember when I first started my interviews, and I was prepping for one of my first participants, I remember making the conscious decision that I would not disclose my experience as a dancer. I did not think it would be very beneficial and I felt that sharing my experience would make the interview more centered around me and I wanted to focus on the participants and so I went into the interviews not disclosing this information.

While I was interviewing one of my first participants, she initially gave vague answers when describing her experience as a ballet dancer. "I don't want to get too into that", she would reply as she withheld information. Trying to get her more engaged, I decided to share a little bit about my experience as a Black woman in ballet, and at that

moment, I can hear in her tone, that she began to feel comfortable with me because she could relate to the comments that I shared about myself. She then began to discuss her experience more with me. She even went back to share more in-depth about the stories that she at first was very vague about and even more about her experience in ballet. Susan Ostrander (1993) describes methodologies experiences of *studying up* (i.e., studying elite). Ostrander discusses how asking pointed questions may be a concern when studying elites because elites may wish to protect their position and have the power to do so. This originally, was the case for my first couple of participants and was the initial concern of a few other participants that at first chose not to be interviewed. However, once she, and a few other participants, realized that we shared some similar experiences and they realized that I had insight into this industry from a similar viewpoint, they then did not have that concern as much.

This also goes back to Cooper (1892) and Collin's (1990) point of Black women's epistemological standpoint and Black feminist theory and the concept of positionality and reflexivity[46]. I bring this up because my history, work and identity were important assets in this research, my positionality and in this case my *cultural capital* allowed me access to collect stories that I may have not been able to get if I wasn't a Black woman with ballet experience and access in the ballet industry. This is similar to Lauren Rivera's analysis on how people of elite jobs have to have access to people within elite spaces and/or an understanding of the elite culture. Riviera discusses how employers of elite jobs favor and value potential employees that can create an interview that feels like a "conversation amongst equals" oppose to an interview in which many people outside of this world would expect –it's not a conversation, it's an interview that's targeted to

whatever the interviewer is saying (Rivera 2016). My experience and positionality allowed me and my participants the ability to have more of a conversation in which felt more organic and brought a great stories and transparency to each interview. On a more personal level, it allowed me to reflect more on my own experience and relationship with ballet and see the patterns that Black women experience due to White supremacy and Whiteness within the ballet institution.

*Participants and Methodology*

This study is based on 50 demographic surveys of Black women and men within ballet, **20** in-depth, semi-structured interviews of Black women who were/are employed by major US-based ballet companies, **8** in-depth, semi-structured interviews of Black men who were/are employed by major US-based ballet companies, and **25** in-depth, semi-structured interviews of Black women who have not danced professionally. 20 interviews are a substantial proportion of the total population of professional Black women in ballet today and throughout time. I was only a few interviews shy of collecting a census of Black women in professional ballet companies. Given that Black women make up less than 5% of the ballet companies today. Less than 1 in 20 ballerinas dancing professionally are Black women.

Participants ranged throughout many different cities and states within the United States, typically major metropolitan cities from Los Angeles, California to Salt Lake City, Utah to Houston, Texas to Boston, Massachusetts to Washington DC and New York City in which many of the participants reside. The participants were between 18 to 85 years-old and represented generations of current and former ballet enthusiast in the US ballet industry[46]. For the dancers, I asked a series of questions about their occupational

trajectory, bodily management, and overall experience of being a Black ballet dancer. For participants that did not make it professionally, I asked about their dance background, how/why it ended, bodily management, and overall experience being a Black dancer. The surveys additional information about childhood exposure to ballet, financial resources, family support and the roles that they had been offered and performed. For interviews, I gave my participants the option to use their real names or pseudonyms and majority of the dancers wanted to be identified to share *their* experiences as Black people and Black ballet dancers and to have their voices and platforms be heard, since historically, Black dancers' history has not been properly shared. With that being said, I will note that I did use real names, if permitted, and anonymized any information they asked to remain private as well as anonymized any information, such as age[46], which could be conceivably harmful to their careers as few of the participants are still currently dancing and many retired still work within the community.

I employed several methods to recruit dancers. As previously mentioned, I utilized my position as a Black former dancer, 2) relied upon my networks with former dancers and 3) as an employee for a major ballet company to gain access to ballet dancers and administrators. I studied the websites of major ballet company's websites and social media i.e., Instagram and Twitter to identify and locate current Black dancers. I contacted them through direct messaging or through email (if their email is presented on their social media account) and confirm their request if they'd be interested in doing a survey and possibly an interview. During data collection, many dancers were in the middle performance season and were not available for interviews. Once I completed the interviews, I coded them using Excel, looking for emergent themes, which provided more

of a grounded theory approach. This led me to focus on specific themes such as: how Black women face stereotypes and discrimination symbolically and overtly within the creative industry of ballet. Throughout my findings, I examine how creative fields, particularly ballet, create exclusive racialized and classed spaces, that creates a constrained career attainment for Black people and ultimately reiterates the exclusive culture within creative spaces. My finding reveal how Black women challenge the monolithic ideologies behind Black people in ballet by sharing a variety of ways in which they maintain and or gain the cultural capital needed to enter the space of ballet, I then share the constraints they face such as discrimination and marginalization following by the racial fatigue and constant exclusion, through particular roles, in which they face in ballet.

*Navigating Real Names and its Limitations*

While conducting one of my first interviews, for this project, one of the participants shared with me how important it was for their stories to be shared as Black women within ballet. She shared how their stories have not been told prior to Misty Copeland becoming Principal and the importance of history being documented. She stated,

> Misty reached back and got more and discussed them publicly. There are other unsung heroes to our story, but they just didn't have the platform.

Another participant shared with me,

> We just want people to remember there was somebody there before, you know, and it's not to take anything away, it's just part of history. And we're still here. We still want to help.

These comments shared, made me realize the importance and implications of preserving their names and stories and so I decided to ask each participant if they would like to use their real name, or a pseudonym and every participant agreed to using their real names.

Scholars have discussed the approach of storytelling and narratives –being an approach that views the lived experiences as constructed by the people telling them. Sociologists typically use pseudonyms in order to protect the participants' privacy. However, similar to Mitchell Duneier and Ovie Carter (1999), I decided not to use pseudonyms because my participants wanted to be identified in order to really share *their* stories and experiences and it is my responsibility to respect their request and tell their stories candidly and from their viewpoint. This is particularly important given that Black people have felt invisible and that they do not have a voice or a platform to share their experiences openly and historically. Black people's stories and contributions have been minimized or left out of history.

While deciding to use their real names, this meant that I would be omitting certain information from my study in order to protect the participants. I decided to withhold their age, similar to models, disclosing age can be harmful for them given that this postindustrial consumer culture places the ideology that beauty is to maintain youthfulness (Dworkin and Wachs 2004: 611). I also gave them the option of utilizing a pseudonym if they wanted to disclose information but did not want their name associated. This is important because there were moments where the information being shared could be held against them within the ballet institution and given that majority of my participants still dance professionally or work within the ballet institution, I wanted to make sure that they were protected but were not limited to the stories being shared. With

that being said, I will note that for a few quotes I used pseudonyms if the participant shared information with me but did not want their name attached to the information being shared. Another choice I had to make, using real names, is to omit the intraracial conversations of colorism. While colorism was a major topic of conversation, I felt for the purpose of this paper, I would not include it. Given that the population of Black people within the ballet institution is minuscule, I felt that I would be putting my participants at risk discussing this matter with real names. With that being said, I acknowledge the role of colorism within ballet and plan to address it, separately, in the future, in a way that will protect my participants and the integrity of the issue at hand.