Embodying race – cultural reproduction of ideals of aesthetics, gender and ethnicity in contemporary dance auditions

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Abstract

Gatekeepers in the contemporary dance field have one of the most influential roles in the development of the artform as well being responsible for shaping and developing the audience's perception through their artistic choices. Additionally, gatekeepers result to cultural ideas of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity when engaging with hiring practices such as auditions and production practices. From the interviews of choreographers, rehearsal directors and artistic directors of the field of contemporary dance in the Netherlands, this thesis addresses the main research question of, How do cultural ideas of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity inform production and audition practices in the contemporary dance field in the Netherlands? Not only do gatekeepers rely on aesthetic conventions of the field when hiring or casting dancers, but also search for specific representations of gender and race in order to find the ideal dancer who will better represent the choreographer or director's artistic vision. This research revealed that gatekeepers have a material view towards the dancing body as the representation or instrument of the work, where social concepts such as gender, sexuality and race are seen as added material qualities. For instance, the social concept of race is perceived as an added-on quality. Not only is this view undermining the dancer's agency and sense of self but further objectifies the dancer's body, specifically the female body. Gatekeepers preach and idealize their art while masking a culture of abusive, manipulative and discriminating attitudes of a hierarchised structure. Additionally, pressures from the public and governmental funds to diversify the performing arts has led to gatekeepers expressing frustration and even resisting attitudes towards diversity efforts. Furthermore, this research gives insights into how gatekeepers reproduce their own habituated practices and ideas on aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity which have been socialized from their own dance education. Such socialization, reflects that such ideals are deep rooted in the overall contemporary dance culture. In order to address the research question, this study draws on qualitative methodology by conducting semi-structured interviews of gatekeepers and using thematic analysis to analyse and interpret the results. This method of analysis was found to be effective in the interpretation of respondent's attitudes, experience and how these are influence by their own perceived reality.

This research offers recommendations and deeper understanding on how to better address the problematic practices rooted in the underlying structures of power in professional contemporary dance institutions. Moreover, this thesis recommends how to improve the conducting of auditions and production practices while avoiding the influence of predisposed assumptions of aesthetics, gender and race and ethnicity.

KEYWORDS: contemporary dance, aesthetics, gender, race, gatekeepers, socialization

Preface

      I would like to firstly thank my supervisor Dr. Naomi Oosterman for her immense support and guidance in the writing of this thesis. I would have never managed without your help and motivation, especially since the pandemic proved to be a massive test for everything and everyone (literally). Secondly, I would like to thank my fellow dancers of the ballet and contemporary dance world for believing in speaking the truth even when that truth is uncomfortable and even sometimes scary. Lastly, I would like to thank my arts & culture friends who without them I would have spiralled into an anxious hole and this would have been a lot less fun.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction

Celebrated 1920's dancer Josephine Baker was famously known to hide the fact that she was a Black woman by resulting to painful activities involving bleaching her own skin in order to look more *white* (Mackrell, 2013b). In the contemporary society of today, one could expect such painful activities to be endeavours of the past, however recent articles have shown these activities are rooted in deeper out-dated and equally dangerous principles of racial oppression and prejudices (Mackrell, 2013b). Now a days, many dancers are still questioned to cover their skin with makeup, or are barred from performing certain roles, due to their ethnicity not fitting with traditional ideals and standards ingrained in the culture of classical dance (Li, 2020). Leading cultural mediators of the field such as choreographers and directors, impose high aesthetical expectations on the dancers which are not only influenced by cultural ideas of gender, but also grounded on westernized ideals of aesthetics (Aalten, 2004; Murray & Price, 2011). Furthermore, amidst the socio-political turmoil of the global Black Lives Matter movement and the #metoo movement many have questioned if the dance world should endure a close investigation and reform in order to address its manifestations of institutional racism and sexual harassment happening in professional dance institutions (Perpener, 2000; Henderson, 2021).

Recent publicized stories such as of Chloe Lopes Gomes (Cappelle & Gomes, 2020) gave light into how predisposed cultural ideas of aesthetics, gender and race and ethnicity influence a dancer's career development.

In her story, Gomes describes not only the way traditional aesthetic standards are damaging and degrading to those of minority backgrounds but also reveals the institutional racism she suffered from close influential gatekeepers who discriminated against her on the basis of her skin colour (Cappelle & Gomes, 2020). The publishing of her story has led to others voicing their experience of being asked to perform degrading practices to mask their skin colour in name of the traditions of classical ballet (Embrechts, 2021).

Besides racial discrimination, articles by Macauley (2017) highlight gender related issues of misogynistic and sexist nature surrounding the professional dance culture and how such ideals need to be challenged as they do not identify with diversity and equality values of the 21st century.

Nevertheless, these accounts reveal a history of abuse, ignorance and discrimination performed by influential cultural mediators of the field such as choreographers, directors and

rehearsal directors, who as the most influential individuals in the field (Janssen & Verboord, 2015), should take responsibility for promoting better practices.

Studies on the influence of appearance can be traced back to phenomena outside of the dance world. A major study by Mears (2014) presents a compelling argument for such practices relating to the impact of appearances in the workplace, specifically in hiring practices such as auditions and castings. Mears (2014) does this by discussing the concept of aesthetic labour first introduced by Warhurst & Nickson (2007) as the idea of hiring on the basis of one's physical appearance. Her research compels a convincing argument that aesthetic labour practices are prominent in female oriented work and emphasize the different power relations of race, ethnicity and gender as the core of aesthetic classifications (Mears, 2014).

Within the dance world, theory on classical ballet reflects strong selection bias on the basis of bodily features such as body type and aesthetics, specifically in relation to the female body (Aalten, 2004). Furthermore, this research will address theories on cultural ideas of aesthetics such as Yan & Bissel (2014) which offers insight into globalization of western beauty ideals which explains the globalisation of western cultural beauty and aesthetic standards including those common aesthetic expectations within the contemporary dance field (Green, 1999).

Going further, Dean (2005) applies the same concept of aesthetic labour to audition practices of the theatre and entertainment world, showing how the concept of race adds on another layer of classification where Black women are further decriminalised on the basis of their gender and race, connecting back to the story of Josephine Baker and Chole Lopes Gomes (Mackrell, 2013b; Cappelle & Gomes, 2020). Such physical segregation is due to predisposed cultural ideals of gender, race and ethnicity (Dean, 2005).

Throughout my education and career as a professional dancer I have witnessed various situations of abuse and discrimination in the classical dance field similar to that of Gomes (Cappelle & Gomes, 2020), hence my motivation to investigate whether such situations also happened in the contemporary dance field where also little research is available. It is my interest to understand how such cultural ideas of aesthetics, gender and race and ethnicity still influence hiring practices in the contemporary dance field by addressing the main research question of this study; *How do cultural ideas of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity inform production and audition practices in the contemporary dance field in the Netherlands?*

The second chapter of this thesis will address the main theoretical studies which address the different concepts of aesthetics, gender race and ethnicity and the role of gatekeepers in the field in order to create a complete contextual background to this research. With the focus on the concepts discussed and analysed in the theoretical section of this thesis, an operationalisation of the main concepts of this study was created and served as a theoretical guide for the data collection and analysis.

In attempts to answer the main research question of this study, directors of professional dance companies, rehearsal directors and choreographers operating in the contemporary dance field in the Netherlands were sampled using both thematic sampling method and snowball sampling method and later interviewed using the semi-structured interview method. This method was chosen due to its effectiveness and efficiency in obtaining in-depth understanding of the gatekeepers' opinions, experiences and points of view on sensitive concepts such as, gender, race and ethnicity (Evans, 2018). Furthermore, the interviews were analysed using the thematic analysis method which allows for a clear and deep understanding of shared patterns of thoughts and experiences between gatekeepers (Braun & Clarke, 2012). A clear description and analysis of the methodology used is addressed in the third chapter of this thesis, where I also address all ethical considerations and my access to the field.

Chapter four provides a clear overview of all the results obtained in the analysis of the semi-structures interviews as well as proper argumentation of the findings on the way cultural ideas of aesthetics, gender and race and ethnicity inform gatekeepers decisions.

The results showed gatekeepers impose implicit criteria based on cultural ideas of aesthetics, gender and race and ethnicity in relation to their own artistic vision and conventions of the field. More importantly, the results reflect that such social demarcations are not perceived as social constructs but as physical qualities added onto the body, further objectifying the dancer's body. Furthermore, insights onto the role of education system in the socialization of such ideals emerged, as well as the conflicting role of artistic freedom and diversity initiatives. This research reveals that problematic ideas of aesthetics, gender and race are still being reproduced in the contemporary dance field even though it prides itself for being the opposite of classical ballet (Kwan, 2017).

This research provides gatekeepers and institutions of contemporary dance with information and insights on the problematic aspects relating to the deep underlying implicit structures of power in the field as well as providing insights into how a few gatekeepers are

creating new improved ways of avoiding cultural bias in the hiring of dancers. Finally, recommendations and advice are addressed in how gatekeepers should take responsibility for their influential role in the field and better acknowledge their own implicit bias on such concepts in auditions.

2 Theories of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity in hiring practices

I began this research by elaborating on the various theories relating to the core concepts of cultural ideals of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity. Firstly, I began by analysing theories of cultural ideals of aesthetics in order to have a better understanding of aesthetic standards and expectations imposed on individuals. This allowed me to have a better contextual background for analysing such notions in relation to the dance field. In this section I also include argumentation on theories in relation to hiring practices such as aesthetic labour and how they are influenced by the same aesthetic ideals. Going further, I expanded on literature and research on cultural ideas of gender, race and ethnicity in how such demarcations are present in the dance field by focusing on the representations of gender roles and how racial demarcations influence hiring practices. Lastly, this section discusses the role of gatekeepers in the field as well as how they engage with dancers and power structures.

2.1 Cultural ideals of aesthetics

What is considered an attractive appearance is very much a social and cultural construct, nevertheless it is also hierarchised in favour of Western cultural ideals of appearance and aesthetics (Bissell & Chung, 2009). In a society which has undergone the effects of globalization, Yan & Bissell (2014) discusses how aesthetic standards are largely influenced by the European and American view of what is aesthetically beautiful. "What used to be specific constructs of beauty for specific cultures might not be overtaken by media constructed standards of beauty and accepted as global standards for most cultures" (Yan & Bissell, 2014, pg. 1). However, aesthetic and attractiveness standards are extremely subjective and influenced by each society's own justifications but nevertheless the media still prefers to idealise western ideals of beauty, distinguishing the western ideals of aesthetics as the standard to which other cultures are compared to (Yan & Bissell, 2014). Therefore, instead of promoting more diverse representations around the world, globalization is causing a standardization of aesthetic ideals dictated by American and Eurocentric standards, which in turn leads to more critical judgements of other cultures (Bissell & Chung, 2009). Consequently, other culture's media tries to adapt to western aesthetic standards hindering their own cultural views of aesthetics as unfit and in need of adjustments (Akinro & Mbunyuza-Memani, 2019). Research by Bissell & Chung (2009) goes further and highlights

the importance of aesthetics ideals in our professional and social daily lives as the main source of judgements and assessments of individuals is aesthetic and appearance based.

Such notion is highly relevant in the performance art field for example seen in works of Dean (2005) and in the classical dance field in Aalten (2004).

Representation of cultural ideals of beauty and aesthetics are increasingly a topic of discussion also in the cultural and performance art world such as theatre and the entertainment industry (Dean, 2005). According to Dean (2005), gatekeepers tend to be stuck on old predisposed cultural ideas and stereotypes on gender, level of attractiveness, desirability and age which leads to them relying on specific cultural standards of the west to make their decisions (Dean, 2005).

More specifically in the professional dance world of classical ballet, ideals on aesthetics are the basis of criteria for hiring next to technique (Aalten, 2004), especially due to the artform being built on specific cultural ideals of tradition, elitism and discrimination (Mackrell, 2013b; Fentroy, 2020). The classical dance form is considered to be an oppressive environment for women due to the dominant ideology of hiring on the basis of an ideal beauty of the past and thus reinforcing misogynistic traditions and hierarchy within the institutions (Aalten, 2004). Such traditions, also reinforce stereotypical and primitive ideals of women and denying them any form of agency (Aalten, 2004). Researchers have been extremely critical of the culture of classical ballet due to the objectification of the body as a mere tool and aesthetic object lacking individualism and agency (Langdon & Petracca, 2010; Aalten, 2004). Consequently, feminist perspectives such as seen in Aalten (2004) pledge for a change in the way bodily aesthetics are viewed in classical dance and stresses the need to challenge such ideals in order to provide the space for dancers to exercise their own agency.

On the contrary, contemporary dance has emerged as a freer and more expressive dance form which evolved partially from classical ballet but also contradicts it through spontaneous movement, with focus on expression rather than through technical restrictions (Noice, 2006). Jennings (2007) goes further by discussing how contemporary and modern dancers have changed the stereotypical perspective of what a female dancer should look like with their emphasis on athletic aesthetic and strength due to the different demands of the dance form. Jennings comments "strong is the new thin" (2007, para. 16) when discussing aesthetics of modern dancers, reflecting a narrow-minded objectifying discourse which minimizes the diversity and subjectivity of bodies.

Emphasis is put on contemporary companies being more inclusive and diverse however recent articles and discussions shows artists are still demanding a stronger consideration of equity and inclusion and for companies to let go of such traditional cultural ideals of aesthetics in hiring processes and auditions (King, 2020). Not only are these predisposed ideals of aesthetics degrading but also minimize the artform of dance from a cultural practice and experience to a mere aesthetic one (Aalten, 2004).

2.2 Aesthetics and hiring practices

Auditions are the primary form of hiring in the dance field (Alter, 1997). As seen in Evans (2016) how a dancer looks and prepares him or herself is essential to have a successful audition. Looking good for the job has been a shared understanding for those not only entering the professional dance field but other labour markets in the contemporary society (Rivers, 2014; Weiss & Feldman, 2006). The idea that one's appearance affecting the hiring process is reflective of the concept of aesthetic labour first introduced by Warhurst & Nickson (2007).

Warhurst and Nickson (2007)' research on the hospitality and retail sector suggests the high importance of appearance and one's attitude in hiring practices within the labour market. Specific bodily dispositions are considered to be desirable in that specific working sector and therefore serve as the main factor for hiring an individual. These hiring practices based on aesthetic labour reflect shared cultural ideals relating to gender, race and ethnicity and aesthetics (Mears, 2014). Going further, James (2008) argues how selective and biased practices are then likely to lead to legal and ethical implications as well as opening room for discriminatory actions on the basis of appearance as well as reenforcing stereotypical ideals of aesthetics based on further demarcations of gender, race and ethnicity.

Aesthetic labour is not only present in retail or hospitality sector but also seen in the cultural and creative industry. Mears (2010) goes further on the topic of aesthetic labour and applies it to the fashion modelling industry where the appearance of a model is the basis of hiring and casting practices. Mears (2010) critically highlights the ethical and social implications caused by gatekeepers hiring on the basis of pre-disposed notions of beauty and appearance to fit to a specific look of a particular section of the market. Her results show gatekeepers and taste makers "diffuse blame and social responsibility to one another" (Mears, 2010, pg. 42) and are therefore stuck to the conventions and expectations enlisted by "the

market" even though essentially, they *make* the market. Due to this constant reliance on cultural conventions and predisposed assumptions of gender and race, such suppositions are institutionally reproduced (Mears, 2010).

Research within the performance art field equally show the impact of aesthetic labour on auditions and casting practices (Dean, 2005). In the performance art world physical characteristics openly serve as a direct criterion for hiring processes and role acquisition specifically with females. Female actors according to Dean (2005) work in separate segmented markets than their male counterparts. Gatekeepers were generally found to firstly judge the person on their choice of clothing according to gendered ideology and other embodied dispositions revealing that performance and skill characteristics have less priority in the assessment (Dean, 2005). As stated in Dean (2003), a qualitative study shows segregation of gender are even more present under categories of appearance, race and ethnicity. Such classifications were found to "frame the working realities of women performers and result in both systematic advantages and more commonly disadvantages" (Dean, 2003, pg. 9).

Within the dance field, hiring on the basis of aesthetic can be seen in the classical ballet world as dancers are hired on the basis of traditional notions of ideal aesthetics of the ballet dancer such as having long legs and thin flexible bodies (Henderson, 2020). As seen in Villareal (2020), dancers can be cut from auditions for the mere reasons of being too tall or too short – aspects of appearance that one cannot change. Such distinctions become even stronger when factors of gender, race and ethnicity are added.

Going deeper into the role of the gatekeepers, Green (1999) discusses how the body is shaped by cultural environment and the perception of others around us. Thus, gatekeepers have a vast impact in how the body of a dancer is shaped and perceived, highlighting the level of influence that gatekeepers have in cultural reproduction of cultural ideas (Green, 1999). The nature of the gatekeeper's discourse was also of a discriminative and objectifying nature which raises questions about what standards these gatekeepers are following and to what extent they are influenced by these cultural ideas of gender, appearance and even age (Dean, 2005).

2.3 Cultural ideas of gender

Aesthetic ideals can be further demarcated into cultural ideals of gender, specifically in relation to femininity and the performance of gender roles (Niu, 2018; Dean, 2014). Niu (2018) discusses how appearance-based discrimination is extremely predominant in largely female oriented jobs in China such as nursing. Supporting this notion, James (2008) argues how women are continuously judged on their appearance and tend to suffer more from such hiring practices. Either they are not attractive enough or are subject to cultural stereotypes and harassment based on their level of attractiveness (Jaames, 2018).

In contrast, some researchers do argue that physical appearance and level of attractiveness should be as important as other qualifications in hiring practices as some employers claim beauty has a direct link to profitability and serve as a reflection of the brand being sold (James, 2008). In the dance world, the "brand" can be seen as the choreographer's artistic vision – he/she will look to hire a dancer who can visually and creatively reflect the choreographer's own movement and artistic style (Saura, 2009), and thus providing opportunity for aesthetic labour practices to happen.

The history of dance has equally strong traditions of femininity (Turk, 2014), specifically when looking at more classical styles of dance such as classical ballet, the view on gender is extremely binary – as in based on traditional notions of behaving male or female (Wiseman & Davidson, 2011).

In classical ballet, the role of the female dancer is highly romanticized with the ballerina representing the epitope of femininity with little room for other representations (Turk, 2014). Even though, contemporary and modern styles of dance are considered to be more diverse, research shows that traditional gender ideals still prevail. Male dancers tend to embody the stereotypical role of the supporter and saviour of the female dancer especially when performing romantic duets (Saura, 2009). Dancers are expected to embody traditional ideals of femininity or masculinity in both their dancing and attitude in the studio such as males being expected to be strong and well-built and females graceful and slender (Clegg et al., 2017; Pickard, 2012). However, the contemporary dance field is known to challenge these traditional notions of gender and femininity by exhibiting strong, powerful female bodies capable of executing traditionally male steps and choreography (Albright, 2010). Furthermore, due to the higher number of females in the field, audition practices tend to be highly competitive for female dancers compared to male dancers (Saura, 2009) leading to gatekeepers resulting to more systemic solutions of hiring such as relying on superficial criteria of aesthetics (Saura, 2009). Due to this increased competition, Saura (2009) goes

further and argues how female and male dancers are subject to different forms of criteria in auditions. Female dancers tend to be judged even more strictly than their male counterparts on less explicit assessments such as, on their aesthetical characteristics of "beauty, grace and mystery" (Saura, 2009, pg. 33) and on the other hand, male dancers are usually judged on their level of passion and vibrancy (Saura, 2009). Hence, such findings reflect the importance and relevance of aesthetical features in the audition practices in classical ballet as well as supporting the theory of aesthetic labour – as in hiring on the basis of aesthetic features such as beauty.

Together with gender is the aspect of sexuality and more specifically how dancers are commonly sexualized from an early age. For example, in classical ballet and modern dance, sexual and erotic themes are commonly present in choreographies as "one thing the artform does best is communicate a physical and sensual intensity that is beyond words" (Mackrell, 2013a, para. 4). However, such juxtaposition has been extremely down played by the media and little research has been done on the connection of classical or modern dance and its sexual connotations (Eccles, 2018). Both notions of sexuality and gender are embodied and performed through dance as a symbolic expression (Hanna, 2010). Such freeing connection with sexuality and erotic expression has made dance a safe place for the expression of homosexuality, however it is not an environment freed of society's complexes and judgements. Due to the stigmatization of sex and erotic themes, many modern choreographers have avoided communicating the connection of their dance to sexual themes even though according to Hanna (2010) dance and sex are interchangeable and inseparable due to both using the body to communicate emotion, specifically pleasure (Hanna, 2010). "On-stage dance takes from sexuality practices "off-stage" and imaginatively stylizes them and possibly reinforces or challenges these practices that include expressions of sexual identity and attraction, flirtatiousness, friendliness, exhibitionism, eroticism, and love-making" (Hanna, 2010, pg. 213). Such strong associations however, can be taken out of proportion from being an expressive artform to dangerously providing opportunity for sexual abuse, bullying on the basis of sexuality and sexual manipulation (Hanna, 2010; Mackrell, 2013a).

In contrast, gender and sexuality have long been used as a empowering forces of expression for modern dance female pioneers of the 20th century such as Martha Graham, Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis as a way to express a rebellion from patriarchy and restrictive environment of classical ballet (Hanna, 1988). However, such effort has always been masked over by the strong patriarchy ruling the field (Hanna, 1988).

10

2.4 Cultural ideas of race and ethnicity

Within the art and cultural sector, art worlds or fields follow certain kind of conventions which will reassure success in such a uncertain, high stakes field (Becker, 1982). Deviating from these conventions is expected to be risky and might lead to failure to please the designated audience. In order to stick to these conventions, gatekeepers tend to look for a body who will best represent these traditional ideals imposed by the field (Mears, 2010). Various studies show evidence that, further segregation on appearance in hiring practices is seen through classifications of race and ethnicity (Dean, 2003). Schaap & Berkers (2019) go further and argue that individuals tend to make classifications explicitly and implicitly on the basis of race and ethnicity, for example assigning cultural products to belonging to a specific race and ethnicity. Schaap & Berkers (2019) argue how unconsciously, individuals make classifications and distinctions in relation to the perceived ethnic and racial identity of the cultural product even when they explicitly communicate the opposite, reflecting how racial distinctions are culturally reproduced and engraved in the subconscious.

In relation to the professional dance field, classical ballet has a strong association with European culture and *whiteness* whether on stage or off stage in the audience. Such belief has been culturally reproduced over the years with little development and efforts in making the artform more inclusive (Fisher, 2016). Such implicit distinctions and classifications are key in the reproduction of such cultural ideals of race and ethnicity (Schaap & Berkers, 2019; Fisher, 2016).

Moreover, within hiring practices such as in job interviews, theory shows that hiring on the basis of *culture matching* is also a common practice (Rivera, 2012). Gatekeepers hire not only on the basis of skill and professionality but also on whether the person fits the culture of the employer in terms of lifestyle, presentation, and leisure activities. This kind of selection perpetuates systems of inequalities in the work environment and can lead to further discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity. Besides that, employers not only connect to the culture of the but also feel an excitement and connection towards that person which increase difficulties of being open to individuals of a different culture and way of living (Rivera, 2012). Therefore, such hiring practices can pose a challenge to diversity and inclusion initiatives as they promote further implicit judgements on the basis of race and ethnicity.

Research shows that cultural perceptions of aesthetics and attractiveness have shifted and become more homogenized due to the strong media influence reflecting westernized beauty ideals (Murray & Price, 2011). Such standards are then portrayed and internalized as universal creating pressures on those who especially do not conform to such westernized aesthetical ideals (Murray & Price, 2011; Yan & Bissell, 2014). Nations where the average individual does not conform to this westernized ideal of aesthetics are now being challenged and encouraged to change aspects of their appearance in order to conform to such standards, for example by submitting to whitening treatments (Yan & Bissell, 2014) or by engaging in plastic surgery and extreme dieting (Bissell & Chung, 2009). Such practices reenforce the narrow representation of aesthetic standards around the globe leading to further distinction and classification of superiority as western standards of aesthetics are deemed as ideal compared to other cultural standards (Bissell & Chung, 2014; Murray & Price, 2011). Such bias on ideals of aesthetics and race will influence how individuals judge and classify each other in their personal and professional life (James, 2008).

Within the theatre, performance and entertainment industry's audition practices and castings, the colour of an actor's skin is very much a criterion of its own (Dean, 2005). Even though, gatekeepers are pressured politically and socially to have more inclusive and diverse programs, they do fail to properly do this without a form of discrimination through type casting practices (Pao, 2010). Typecasting is a fairly common practice in performance art and entertainment as it makes the hiring of artists easier and safer, especially since fields like theatre and film rely extensively on marketability and recognizability in order to obtain a level of success (Wojcik, 2003). This aspect does not solve the issues as it still encourages the inequality between white and non-white actors by organizing "the supply of acting labour according to deeply embedded social assumptions (about race, gender, class, age, disability and sexuality) held by playwrights, screenwriters, directors, producers, and casting directors" (Friedman & O'Brien, 2017, pg. 360). Additionally, typecasting can lead to tokenism rather than honest representation, hiring dancers of a specific race as a symbolic gesture rather than efforts to become more diverse (Howard, 2021). However, this is left for the integrity and honesty of the gatekeepers to make true representative decisions (Howard, 2021).

Classical dance has its roots in European history of dance therefore the traditional conventions are of the white body as the dancing body (Embrechts, 2021), however such conventions are stuck in old traditions and do not fit with the diverse society of the 21st century. Within the classical ballet world such discriminatory and questionable casting

endeavours are fairly common for example, being called degrading racist names seen in Embrechts (2021).

For many decades as seen with jazz dance legend Josephine Baker, dancers and performers have resulted in various measures in order to hide their true skin colour (Mackrell, 2013b; Cappelle & Gomes, 2020). Putting on body makeup for specific performances in order to give a translucent and homogenous outlook to the skin used to be a common traditional practice in classical ballet (Embrechts, 2021). Ballet's long history of colonialism, tradition and elitism are seen in the performances, casting and costume such painting blackface or wearing problematic stereotypical wigs (Howard, 2020). Howard clarifies "these are aspects of the classical ballet aesthetic that represent the overt ways in which systematic racism results in the exclusion that's present, telegraphing ballet's commitment to whiteness" (Howard, 2020, para. 5).

In contrast, the contemporary dance world is known to be more inclusive and diverse in the matters of appearances, race and ethnicity. Even though much of modern dance was influenced by Black individuals, more research is needed to understand the extent to which contemporary dance institutions really took on the role of racial inclusivity (Krasner, 2002).

As addressed by DiAngelo (2016), individuals within a society are all socialized into a system of structured relations which derives from racist and discriminatory traditions where it is not in one's intention but racism is a concept embedded in the unconscious. Therefore, discrimination is highly based on the predisposed cultural ideals of race and ethnicity we are socialized into which in turn are reflected in decisions and assessments of others (DiAngelo, 2016).

In dance, "mis- and underrepresentation perpetuates negative social understandings, biased standards and racist points of view" (King, 2020, para. 13). Looking at gatekeepers' perceptions and experiences and analyse them will aid in uncovering patterns of thought which are influenced by these predisposed ideals.

There have been various efforts to change systemic discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity, however clear direct manifestation of racism has been replaced according to Perpener (2000), with more concealed forms of white power and privilege manifested in what is seen as a colour-blind society. This, in turn ignores the systemic and unconscious racially driven classifications made by institutions and gatekeepers (Frazer-Carroll, 2020).

As a way to tackle discriminating practices in cultural institutions a few governmental and non-governmental associations have created policies and initiatives which address hiring

practices and equal opportunity for all involved (Code Diversiteit & Inclusie, 2020). Such codes monitor and make recommendations on the diversity and inclusivity status of the cultural institution (Code Diversiteit & Inclusie, 2020). These organizations argue that diversity and inclusion of all kinds of individuals is an advantage for cultural institutions and therefore such initiatives should be taken with high priority (Code Diversiteit & Inclusive, 2020). However, little is known about how such initiatives are actually implemented.

2.5 The role of gatekeepers

Before analysing the way cultural ideals of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity inform audition and production practices, it is essential to this research to understand who are the gatekeepers and what are their roles in the contemporary dance field.

Gatekeepers are the taste makers of the cultural sector and therefore their role is crucial in shaping and developing audience's perception through their aesthetic choices (Englis et al., 1994). Such choices on casting, costumes, makeup all aid in shaping their own ideals of what is aesthetically pleasing for the audience (Englis et al., 1994). Janssen & Verboord (2015) go further and argue that gatekeepers, also called cultural mediators are essential agents to artists in the way the help to establish an artist's reputation and reach an appropriate audience, further highlighting the importance of their role within the career and success of the artist.

Becker (1982) stated that a production of an art work is done with the effort of various individuals not solemnly the artist. The dance world is not different. Gatekeepers of the contemporary dance world include anyone who is involved with the cultural production of the art work (Janssen & Verboord, 2015), such as artistic directors, choreographers, rehearsal directors or ballet masters and critics. As tastemakers, gatekeepers take on various roles within the cultural field and the motives for their decisions tend to consist of a blend of political, aesthetical, commercial and moral factors (Janssen & Verboord, 2015). However, as seen in Dean (2005) their true decisions might not be as morally and socially correct as intended. Gatekeepers of the field, easily rely on conventions and traditional standards of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity when making their decisions in order to ensure a successful creation (Dean, 2005).

Within the setting of a professional company, artistic staff are at the "pinnacle of the hierarchy" (Howard, 2020, para. 9). The ballet masters or rehearsal directors are the point of

contact of the dancers to the director and thus they are the ones with the most power to impose their ideals and ensure the ensemble of dancers maintains it's quality (Howard, 2020). Therefore, such hierarchical position allows room for discrimination, emotional and psychologic manipulation and abuse of power (Howard, 2020; Cappelle & Gomes, 2020). This gap between the artistic staff and the dancers reflects extreme power dynamics of the dance field and how it operates specifically in classical ballet companies and professional ballet schools. Recent articles highlight how gatekeepers in the field aid in the creation of an unsafe environment for both young and professional dancers through actions of misconduct, manipulation and fear, all in name of the artform and the artistic product (DaSilva, 2021; Cappelle & Gomes, 2020; Villarreal, 2018).

Such issues of abuse are seen to be almost commonplace in the dance field due to the natural exclusive nature of the artform. Gatekeepers themselves tend to reproduce such abusive behaviour due to them being socialized since young into the culture present in professional dance education institutions (Villarreal, 2018). Specifically with male gatekeepers, it is more common to find situations of abuse of power towards female dancers specifically of a sexual nature (DaSilva, 2021; Villarreal, 2018). Unfortunately, such happenings are commonplace in the dance world however most go unnoticed due to the lack of transparency in professional and educational dance institutions (DaSilva, 2021; Cappelle, 2021). Additionally, gatekeepers in the field, specifically artistic directors are still very much protected due to their artistic status and position of power in the field (Sayej, 2018).

As seen in Schaap & Berkers (2019), individuals perform culture marking as in making implicit and explicit classifications and distinctions on the basis of race and ethnicity when consuming cultural goods. As tastemakers, it is expected that gatekeepers will also result to such practices whether consciously or unconsciously during the hiring and casting practices of dancers. An example of culture marking in the dance world is seen in stories by young Black dancers highlight how gatekeepers in the classical dance field are quick to make distinctions and assign dancers to specific styles of dance due to their race and ethnicity (Embrechts, 2021). "They said, 'Maybe you should look around at contemporary companies. They have a diverse composition." (Embrechts, 2021, para. 4). The same distinctions were not imposed on Caucasian/white dancers. These kinds of assumptions are extremely common in both the professional education and professional companies where teachers and directors have significant influence in the dancer's future career. Such accounts highlight the very much present prejudice inflicted by gatekeepers on dancers hiring.

2.6 Conclusion

The dance world has been under pressure to undergo a paradigm shift however, as seen in this section of the theoretical framework, the professional dance world is still slow to adapt to such social and cultural developments. Theories on cultural ideas of aesthetics, gender and race and ethnicity discussed, highlight how cultural ideas on these concepts are both consciously and unconsciously influencing hiring practices in various fields, including the dance field. Research and recent personal accounts from the classical ballet field show evidence of the impact of long held assumptions of aesthetics, gender and race and ethnicity on professional dancer's careers and overall development of the field (Aalten, 2004; Embrechts, 2021; DaSilva, 2021; Cappelle, 2021). Besides that, theories of gatekeepers in the dance field reflect the reliance on an organizational structure based on hierarchical positions and power disparities where assumptions and long held ideals of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity can be reenforced.

In an artistic work field highly influenced by aesthetic principles, a clear analysis of how gatekeepers' decisions are informed by cultural ideals of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity is needed in order to better understand how to tackle discrimination, mal practice and abuse. In the next section, I discuss the appropriate methodology and research design used to obtain and analyse data acquired from the interviews with gatekeepers of the contemporary dance field.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This thesis is a qualitative methods study with the focus on analysing cultural ideas of gender, ethnicity and aesthetics of gatekeepers in their audition and production practices. Therefore, the main research question of this thesis is *How do cultural ideas of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity inform production and audition practices in the contemporary dance field in the Netherlands?*

This research asks for a sensitive and profound approach due to the complexities of discussing implications concerning concepts such as gender, race and ethnicity, which may challenge long held values and intimate personal views and in turn make individuals feel uncomfortable and confronted (Sue, 2016). In this following section, the methodology of this research is thoroughly discussed starting with a description of the research design, followed by explanation of sampling methods, operationalisation and overview of ethical issues and access to the field.

3.2 Sampling

For this research, I recruited 11 different gatekeepers and cultural mediators who are currently working or have previously worked in the contemporary dance field in the Netherlands. Additionally, these gatekeepers also needed to have been personally involved in audition and casting practices of dancers in the Netherlands. I managed to recruit through theoretical sampling nine respondents and an additional two other respondents through snowball sampling. The theoretical sampling method allowed me to select individuals with the guidance of previous theory by Janssen & Verboord (2015) and Howard (2020) which both highlight the different occupations of gatekeepers and their role in reproducing and developing cultural ideals of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity in the dance field. Thus, I focused on recruiting artistic directors and choreographers due to their artistic status and power in the field as well as rehearsal directors due to their close relation with dancers and their relevant influence on casting and audition decisions (Howard, 2020). Furthermore, snowball sampling was an additional efficient method to acquire extra individuals outside of my immediate professional network as only recruiting through theoretical sample was deemed difficult within the time frame of this research. Snowball sampling is an effective way to

reach difficult specific population (Atkinson & Flint, 2001), such as gatekeepers of the contemporary dance world who work or have worked in the Netherlands.

In total, I managed to obtain a sample of five choreographers, two rehearsal directors and four artistic directors who are currently working or have previously worked in the field of contemporary dance in the Netherlands (see full list of respondents in Appendix 3 with demographics). I wanted to make sure to have an appropriate representation of the different kind of gatekeepers involved in the audition processes and production castings, therefore the respondents had various job roles within the field as well as operating in both established dance companies and independent freelance based projects. The gatekeepers consisted of four females and seven male gatekeepers of various nationalities. Additionally, all respondents were of a Caucasian background expect one who had a bi-racial background as finding a more diverse sample posed to be difficult within the time frame. This equally reflects on the professional field of dance being a predominantly white field (Embrechts, 2021). Furthermore, I decided to limit my search to gatekeepers in the Netherlands in order to make my research more feasible within the time frame.

3.3 Research Design

One of the most efficient ways to address individual's opinions and understandings is through qualitative research (Brown, 2010), therefore this study takes on a qualitative approach in its methods by conducting interviews on gatekeepers and cultural mediators of the contemporary dance field. My choice of conducting interviews was motivated by the need to obtain inside knowledge and understanding of gatekeeper's views, decisions and experiences in relation to audition and production practices. A focus on the interior and interpretation by implementing a qualitative approach would allow me to obtain such information (Ritchie et al., 2013).

As seen in previous research by Mears (2010), interviewing gatekeepers would provide insights into processes of decision making in hiring practices and how such practices are influenced by predisposed cultural ideals of concepts such as aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity. Her methodology not only shows an effective application of qualitative methods but also appropriate ways to address such sensitive topics of cultural ideals of race and ethnicity.

The main research question of this thesis will be addressed using semi-structured interviews as a successful versatile method for an in-depth understanding of the respondents

own subjective viewpoint and experiences (Evans, 2018). Such method is recognized as allowing both structure and flexibility to the research thus being an ideal method to address and stay relevant to a specific concept such as cultural ideals of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity while at the same time allowing for the interview to adapt to the respondent (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). As a valuable method of gathering data, semi-structured interviews allow for enough flexibility and sensitivity to address topics which might be of sensitive nature such as discussions of discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity.

According to Dempsey et al. (2016), research on sensitive topics requires careful planning and sensitivity due to the ability of the interview questions and topics of discussion to possibly stimulate negative emotions of discomfort and intimidation, which might put the participant under stress. Consequently, it is advised in this kind of research to develop a connection with the respondent before starting the interview (Dempsey et al., 2016). Qu & Dumay (2011) go further and state how most importantly, semi-structured interviews are "capable of disclosing important and often hidden facets of human and organizational behaviour" (Qu & Dumay, 2016, pg. 246) which essentially, it is what I aim to achieve by interviewing gatekeepers.

Each interview ranged between 45 minutes and 1 hour and 15 minutes and they were conducted online using the online calling tool Zoom. Conducting online interviews was deemed the most appropriate alternative to face-to-face interviews due to participants residing in different countries and due to the Covid-19 pandemic imposing traveling and health related restrictions. Researchers have been fairly critical of online interviews and are usually more in favour of face-to-face interviews due to its well documented advantages (Gray et al., 2020). However, recent research shows evidence of the benefits of conducting online interviews via applications like Zoom which allows easy accessibility, convenience and it is economically beneficial to both parties (Gray et al., 2020). Specifically for situations where traveling is not possible such as for this research, online interviews are therefore a great alternative. Additionally, online interviews have shown to aid the respondent in feeling more comfortable in engaging with personal topics while in the comfort of their home or place of choice as well as being a less intimidating scenario overall (Gray et al., 2020). Such advantages were evident during the interview as participants showed satisfaction with the flexibility provided by participating in the online interview as it could be more easily rescheduled compared to when planning a face-to-face interview.

Few disadvantages were encountered in relation to adopting this method of online interviewing such as connection issues. However, such disadvantages were also expected such as technical issues and unstable internet connection (Sipes et al., 2019). A semi-structure interview method required a detailed interview guide (see Appendix A) to be made using the information gathered in previous theory prior to the interviews. This allowed me to create a basic structure of the conversations where I could plan when to address the different concepts of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity obtained from the theoretical framework of this study. The interview guide would also have the role of standardizing the interview making sure the same meaning of each question is conveyed to each respondent (Barriball, 1994). It was important all respondents understood the questions in the same way as when especially dealing with non-native English speakers, language can be more easily misunderstood and different meanings can be attributed in the same language (Barriball, 1994).

Finally, all interviews were recorded with consent from the respondents, and transcribed.

3.4 Operationalisation

The main concepts of this research were previously addressed in the theoretical framework section of this research. This gave light into the theories on the concepts of cultural ideas of aesthetics and aesthetic labour, cultural ideas of gender and cultural ideas of race and ethnicity. Additionally, theories on the role of gatekeepers were also distinguished and analysed. In order to obtain a thorough analysis, these concepts were operationalised into different topics for the interview guide (Appendix A), which helped me measure these theoretical concepts in addition to any other information gathered inductively in the interviews.

The interview guide was divided into four different sections each relating to a different theoretical concept. Together these gave insights into how cultural ideas of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity inform decisions of gatekeepers in audition and production practices.

The interview started with a short introduction of myself and the current study as well as some discussion of my background as a dancer in order to create proximity and a relatable connection with the respondent. This was followed by questions in respect to who the respondent is and what their job in the dance field entails. Questions such as "can you tell me about your-self?" allow for a clear context to be created and better understanding of the

respondent's background. In relation to their specific job in the dance field and how they conduct auditions, questions were created relying heavily on the theory by Janssen & Verboord (2015) and articles by Howard (2020) about the role of gatekeepers in the dance field. For example, asking the gatekeepers to describe their job and "Do you see yourself as a tastemaker within the field of contemporary dance?". This section allowed for a deeper understanding of the gatekeeper's role and job characteristics as well as how they approach their dancers and own artistic work. These questions also provided me with relevant context and insights into how the gatekeepers perceive their own position in the field.

In order to understand how aesthetic ideals inform gatekeepers decisions, various questions were operationalised relating to what kind of appearance expectations the gatekeepers have and what kind of features they look for in a dancer in auditions. Such operationalisation was influenced by theories of Evans (2016), Dean (2005) and Aalten (2004) where aesthetic characteristics are seen to be one of the main criteria for the hiring individuals. This motivated questions such as "What do you think makes a dancer aesthetically beautiful?". Research by Aalten (2004) also informed questions which address any aesthetic bodily features and stereotypes of a dancer's bodies and whether such notions are relevant in auditions for example by asking respondents whether they believe there are aesthetic stereotypes for contemporary dancers. Furthermore, this section was heavily influenced by the work of Mears (2010) and how the researcher approached the discussion on aesthetic ideals with gatekeepers in relation to how different looks of individuals can inform a specific style. This is especially seen in questions which ask "Do you think choreographers have a particular aesthetic?".

Throughout the interview, follow up questions were essential to make sure the conversation kept flowing in a natural manner. Theories of Dean (2005) and Aalten (2004) showed a clear link between aesthetics and gender which then inspired questions that stimulated a smooth transition to the following topic of cultural ideas of gender.

For the concept of cultural ideas of gender, the focus was to better understand how such concept informs decisions of gatekeepers in audition and production practices. The operationalisation of questions such as what do gatekeepers think about the female role in contemporary dance and whether what attracts them to a dancer differs between genders allowed me to understand whether gatekeepers still relied on conventional gender roles in their work as whether this reflected on the way they judged female and male dancers. I relied on theories by Saura (2009) and Albright (2010) which specifically discuss cultural ideas of

gender in the dance field. Specifically, theory by Saura (2009) stimulated questions on the different aesthetic pressures female and male dancers have within the field with the question "What is your opinion on the pressures of fitting to a specific appearance between females and males?". This further provides insights into gatekeepers understanding of gender differences in the field in relation to aesthetic features.

Going further, to address ideals of race and ethnicity, the interview guide started by addressing questions informed by theory of typecasting by Wojcik (2003), Friedman & O'Brien (2017) and Howard (2021) and its role in reproducing racial distinctions in performance art. Questions such as "What is your opinion on the necessity of type casting?" stimulated discussions on the role of race and ethnicity in castings and auditions. In order to have deeper insights on gatekeepers understanding and opinion of ideas of race and ethnicity in the dance field and especially in audition practices the code of inclusion and diversity was discussed drawing on theory by Code Diversiteit & Inclusie (2020). This gave me understanding on gatekeepers' opinions of diversity initiatives and whether they participate in them or not. I introduced the executive summary of the code of diversity and inclusion in my interview guide (Code Diversiteit & Inclusie, 2020) in case they were not aware of such code. It is worth to note that between each question I looked for opportunities to engage further with the respondent and ask for any clarifications.

To end the interview, I also asked whether the respondents have any recommendations or thoughts on how to deal with race discussions and issues in the field which allowed for further clarification and insights into their own opinions and view of such diversity within the field. Finally, I thanked them for their participation.

3.5 Data analysis

The transcript of each interview was coded and analysed through the method of thematic analysis. This interpretive method allowed me to identify patterns and themes from the respondents' responses, thus being it an efficient method in understanding a respondent's experience and meaning making processes as well as allowing me to identify any consistencies between each interview (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Going further unlike other methods of qualitative analysis, thematic analysis according to Braun & Clarke (2012) has the ability to operate as both an "essentialist or realist method" (2012, pg. 81) meaning it deals

with reporting respondents own experiences meaning making and own reality. On the other hand, thematic analysis also can operate as a constructionist method, "which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, pg. 81). This method allows for insights to arise on how society impacts respondents meaning making and therefore ideal in understanding how cultural ideas of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity inform gatekeepers decisions.

I began my analysis with the process of examining and coding each interview transcript thoroughly by coding words, phrases or sections which were relevant to the research question and the different concepts addressed in this research. This method of analysis allowed me to go beyond such coding and look for implicit and explicit ideas due to its interpretative ability (Alhojailan, 2012). Consequently, I then looked for patterns and similarities between the respondent's answers and finally I located similarities and relationships between these themes which in turn lead to the creation of further sub-themes (Alhojailan, 2012). This phase in coding and identification of common themes and relationships between the interviewees responses allows for new emerging themes to arise. All themes and codes uncovered throughout the analysis can be seen in the code book in appendix B. From the first phase of the analysis, a total of 122 codes were developed from the 11 interview transcripts. After further analysis of such codes, I created 7 code groups or themes to which the same codes were allocated to. In order to display my data more concretely, I created 5 topics of discussion on the basis of these themes which will be critically addressed in the following results chapter.

With such method of interviewing, the data gathered was not completely overt therefore a good analysis and interpretation of the hidden content was needed, especially when discussing thoughts and opinions on the role of race and ethnicity and other sensitive topics. Thematic analysis deals with both *manifest* content meaning the content which is evident and directly perceived and analysis of the *latent* content meaning the what lies behind the observable which in turn relies largely on interpretation of the researcher (Marks & Yardley, 2004). An example of manifest content would be discussing directly preferring dancers of a certain race while latent content would be noticing an uncomfortable attitude when discussing discrimination. During the interviews, I made sure to look for any signs of uncomfortableness or specific body language which can indicate further meaning in what the respondent was saying. Non-verbal communication can be equally relevant in revealing

meaning in an interview (Gray et al., 2020). Additionally, I analyzed the transcript for non-specific and ambiguous language which indicated any reluctance to discuss a specific topic or opinion. Going further, the manifest content was analyzed thoroughly during the coding process of the thematic analysis. I was well aware that such method of analysis would ask me to reread the transcripts at least twice to make sure that especially the implicit content was identified and interpreted. According to Bogdan & Biklen in Alhojailan (2012), it is highly advised that the transcripts are read a few times in order to fully grasp all hidden aspects of the interviews. I decided to read the transcripts before and after the analysis to make sure no information was missed and prevent any rushed conclusions.

3.6 Ethical Discussion

When undergoing social science research, one must always take into account any ethical concerns that might arise during the research. One of the first issues which I made sure to address was to provide a consent form to the respondent. This form described the main focus of this research and what the respondent should expect from the interview. Additionally, it also asks the respondent to provide consent for his answers to be used in this research as well as consent for the interview to be recorded. By recording the audio of the interview, the researcher is able to be fully involved without being concerned with other matters such as transcribing, and thus creating a deeper connection with the individual being interviewed as well as create a more engaging environment (Whiting, 2008). Besides that, the consent form clearly explains all the rights of the respondent including their right to refuse to answer questions and right to excuse themselves from the interview (Smith, 1992).

To address issues of privacy and confidentiality, I made sure the interviews and transcripts were fully anonymous by naming each respondent in the interviews as a number, such as respondent 1 or respondent 9 and in the results, I address the respondents by their job title as to also create context of their position in the field.

When addressing such topics as opinions on gender and race and ethnicity related issues, it was important for me to establish an initial connection with the respondent due to the personal and sensitive nature of these concepts. Whiting (2008) shows how respondents tend to be more open and comfortable when they feel a connection or similarity with the person interviewing them. I started then by asking introductory questions about the respondent and their work showing interest in their practice and activities. The aim was to create a

comfortable inviting environment in order for the respondent to feel comfortable in discussing sensitive topics such as cultural ideas of gender, race and possible practices and ideas on discrimination.

One issue which came into my attention was the possible language barrier between myself as the researcher and the respondents. Various of the respondents did not have English as a first language therefore their vocabulary was less complex. Due to this, I relied on my interview guide and on my own interpretation to make sure the respondent understood the question properly. Using semi-structured interviews also allowed me to ask for clarification of any answers I did not fully understand as sometimes the language used by the respondents could be slightly vague and ambiguous.

3.7 Access to the field and motivation

As the researcher, my access to the field was through my own personal history and background within the field myself. Since the age of 3, I have trained to become a professional dancer, starting first with classical education and later moving on to contemporary and modern dance after finishing my classical dance education. Afterwards I also attended a professional school of contemporary and modern dance to which I graduated. I spent then 1 year working as a professional dancer in a company and later 2 years in the freelance scene. During my education and professional career, I was able to build a small network which I used as a starting point for my sampling for this research. Besides that, during my education, I witnessed various incidents of misjudgement, discrimination such as being asked to cover my face and body in makeup to make my skin whiter and more *translucent* against the white dresses. Besides this, I have witnessed various form of body shaming which have made me step away from the classical dance and turn to contemporary dance in search of a freer form of expression. However, even in the contemporary dance field especially in audition practices, I still witnessed gatekeepers falling back on traditional and old fashion views of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity, hence the motivation for this investigation.

3.8 Conclusion

In this section, I have addressed the full research design, with a critical view of my choice on conducting semi-structured interviews and the clear description of how I operationalised the concepts obtained from the theoretical framework. Furthermore, I have argued my choice of sampling methods of both thematic sampling and snowball sampling as the most appropriate in considerations with the accessible network and available time for conducting this research. The use of thematic analysis as my method of data analysis was also critically argued and deemed an efficient method for such research. Finally, I carefully engaged with all the ethical considerations I have taken in this research and provided a short text clarifying my background as a dancer which explains how I obtained access to the field of contemporary dance.

4 Results

Gatekeepers interviewed showed diverse levels of awareness of the influence of cultural ideas on aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity on hiring practices in the contemporary dance field. From the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, a total of seven themes arose which contribute to answering of the research question of this thesis. These themes can be seen in the code book as reproduction of ideas on aesthetics, reproduction of ideas on gender, cultural ideas of diversity, reproduction of ideas of race and ethnicity, artistic freedom, new perspectives, impact of education, and finally power and hierarchy. These themes were organized into 5 different topics or sections which will explain further relationships between the themes. In this following section, the findings of this research will be presented by topic.

The first topic to be discussed represents results gathered in relation to the themes of reproduction of ideas on aesthetics and reproduction on ideas of gender, where gatekeepers demonstrated to be influenced by cultural ideas of aesthetics and gender in their decisions in auditions and castings of dancers. This section draws on theories of Aalten (2004), Albright, (2010) and Sorignet (2004) and others to theorize my interpretations of the findings on the way gatekeepers reproduced cultural ideas of aesthetics and gender.

The following topic to be argued is cultural reproduction of race and ethnicity which includes discussions of the themes cultural ideas of diversity and reproduction of ideas of race and ethnicity. Here, I delve deeper into how gatekeepers discuss racial aspects within the field and how such views inform their decisions in the hiring of dancers. Additionally, I discuss how the gatekeepers demonstrated colorblind racism and distribution of responsibility by delving on theory by Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich (2011), Dean (2003) and Frazer-Carroll (2020).

Furthermore, the topic of artistic freedom vs. diversity principles was created to address the themes of artistic freedom and how it relates to diversity initiatives and cultural ideals of diversity. This section was interpreted and then theorized using theories by Johansson & Lindström Sol (2021) on artistic freedom and Glow et al., (2020) which promote deeper understanding of the findings.

In the results it was found that the gatekeepers professional dance education had relevant influence on how cultural ideas of aesthetics, gender and race and ethnicity impact their decisions. By addressing theory of socialization and cultural reproduction by Bourdieu (1979) and DiAngelo (2016) I explain and argue these findings by addressing the theme of

27

impact of education. The final topic merges the theme of power and hierarchy with the theme of new perspectives under one overarching topic of power, hierarchy and the new way forward. The first theme discusses emerging theme of abuse of power of gatekeepers specifically due to the hierarchised culture of dance – drawing on theories of Sorignet (2004) and Howard (2020) on the power of artistic staff and Grama & Todericiu (2016) on organizational culture. This section will also highlight how some younger gatekeepers are changing the dance culture and challenging the way these cultural ideas are present in the dance field, especially during auditions and production practices.

4.1 Cultural Reproduction of aesthetics and gender

Understood as a highly visual artform, the respondents showed a common understanding of contemporary dance as being closely if not entirely linked to the aesthetics of a dancer such as how they look and perform. A dancer's appearance and overall aesthetic has a significance influence on the dance piece itself. Due to this, the respondents believe in auditions, choreographers or directors look for the right individual who possesses characteristics which will fulfil his or hers choreographic and artistic vision – sometimes relying on pre disposed notions of aesthetics which will be further discussed in this section.

All the gatekeepers showed awareness of how aesthetics make up a large part of the artform of contemporary dance, however, instead of discussing specific aesthetical features that they look for, various gatekeepers discuss an overall attraction and enchantment, even expressed as similar to looking for a romantic partner. Rehearsal Director 2 describes;

> "Choreographers look for a certain person and appearance is a is a big thing. If you look for your life partner appearance is a big thing… I call it the falling in love thing but this aesthetic part that's the base that's what they what they(sic) want to see in all their people" (Rehearsal Director 2, male)

This comment by the gatekeeper describes the hiring practice as somewhat of an intuitive process ruled by chance, relating closely to the concept of *the meeting* described in Sorignet (2004). This entails that training and technical abilities are alone not enough to stand out and to be successful in an audition. Other external implicit requirements are deemed more relevant such as the perceived aesthetical beauty of the dancer and the ability to enchant the

directors (Sorignet, 2004). According to Sorignet (2004), choreographers in the contemporary field impose sets of implicit criteria of physical attributes that not only "attract the eye" (para. 42) but also eroticize working relationships and further objectify bodies of the dancers (Sorignet, 2004; Aalten, 2004). The audition process is romanticized into a moment of falling in love with the dancer.

Many empirical studies as well as quantitative studies show evidence of what Shahani-Denning (2003) discusses as beauty bias. This is explained as what or who is considered beautiful is attributed as good or better. James (2008) goes further and shows how in hiring practices such beauty bias is even more evident as is a perceived as a direct criterion of intelligence, confidence and capability.

A quote from Choreographer 9 clearly highlights such bias as; "People want to hire good looking dancers or human beings who can dance. Also, they need to be in a sort of shape. Most of the time. Of course, there can be exceptions".

In classical ballet, gatekeepers look for the specific ballet aesthetic and body type based on the idea that bodies need to be hyper flexible and extremely slim (Aalten, 2004; Pickard, 2012). However, research shows ideally contemporary dance promotes a wider representation of body types but objectification of the body still occurs on other levels, such as beauty and other physical appearance characteristics as in fitness level (Sorignet, 2004). Such comment by Choreographer 9, reflects still a narrow view of the possibilities of what a dancer's body can look like. He goes further;

> "Personally, I like to see a little bit of fit people on stage (.) they don't have to have a six pack but just like, work on yourself and be able to go through a piece without dying because you're actually carrying five extra kilos." (Choreographer 9)

The respondents all expressed the preference for dancers who show a well-trained and healthy fit body natural of a dancer who has undergone rigorous training since young. Dance training conditions and shapes the body of the dancer but also it shapes a specific physical identity within the particular area in the field (Albright, 2010). Gatekeepers expect dancers to be at their top athletic ability. What entails as a healthy well-trained body is extremely subjective to the individual and will most definitely also *look* different depending on the individual (Kourlas, 2021).

Besides attraction and looking for aesthetically pleasing individuals, various gatekeepers discussed the trend some choreographers and directors adopted of looking for dancers who have an out of norm appearance and aesthetic - for example having extreme physical capabilities or a more alternative look such as wearing face and body piercings, colourful hair and tattoos. Such look indicates a specific attitude and presence which they hope will elevate the quality of their choreographic work. Choreographer 5 explains this by stating how those of a more ordinary appearance will be at disadvantage or even fail to be noticed in auditions even though artistically and technically they are equally as talented. By doing so, the gatekeepers are challenging predisposed ideals of beauty characteristic of the classical ballet world (Aalten, 2004) however, at the same time segregating on other aesthetic and appearance-based attributes. Here such attributes have a negative effect on the audition as dancers are not considered edgy, weird or interesting enough to portray the vision of the choreographer, reflecting how beauty bias can also have a negative result in contrast to the idea of what is beautiful is good (Shahani-Denning, 2003). This form of distinction and assessment of physical aesthetic characteristics of the dancer closely relates to the research by Mears (2010) of the fashion industry on how models are assigned to a specific style or type of section in the fashion market, based on their appearance and aesthetic features. Those who are considered edgy or androgenous looking are assigned to the most high-fashion and Avant-garde section of the field while those considered beautiful are more assigned to a more commercial section of the fashion industry. In the dance field, and edgier look would perhaps fit to a more experimental theatrical performance rather than lyrical (Albright, 2010).

Going more specifically on aesthetic features, Kosut (2000) argues how body art such as tattoos can communicate specific narratives about the individual and his or her culture, reflecting the complex relationships between the body, identity and society. These notions are very much present in the dance world as the body is viewed as the instrument of communication, which embodies the experiences obtain during years and years of training (Aalten, 2004). By looking for more edgier and weirder looks, gatekeepers express the intention of looking for a dancer which represents the specific narrative and cultural ideal the gatekeeper wishes to reflect in his work and thus objectifying the body of the dancer.

In dance, the body is objectified by both the dancer and the gatekeeper as tools that can be modified and perfected in order to properly serve the desired purpose of either communicating a specific ideal of one self or the ideal desired by the gatekeeper. The body and the self are separated as it operates not for the self but for others (Sorignet, 2004).

According to the feminist perspective, such objectification of the body is reflected in the reality of females around the world, especially in the western culture as women are daily objectified by the male gaze reflective of a male dominated society (Aalten, 2004).

During the interviews, it became clear that aesthetic pressures are extremely gendered with the majority of the respondents agree that female professional dancers have more pressures in relation to their aesthetic appearance compared to male dancers. The respondents believe that such pressures are partially due to the fact that female dancers occupy a much larger portion of the population of professional contemporary dancers (Saura, 2009). Pressure to fit to specific aesthetics ideas is still seen especially in female dancers due to the such ideals being reproduced by society through institutions and the overall dance culture (Bissell & Chung, 2008; Jennings, 2007; Henderson, 2020). Choreographer 5 discusses further the female pressures;

"if their environment puts more pressure on them and they put more pressure on themselves …If I want to get ahead if I want to stick out then I have to be prettier thinner longer, all those things … also because of preconceptions of aesthetics that are part of society, but also part of the dance field itself" (Choreographer 5, male)

Caruso in Henderson (2020) argues how even though male dancers also suffer from aesthetic pressures, there is still a much broader acceptance of different types of bodies compared to the standards set on female dancers by dance institutions. Such high standards and aesthetics pressures can be explained also by the field's close connection with the representation and performance of traditional gender roles. Movement very much like language, has been developed by a culturally male-dominated society, therefore dance can easily whether as a conscious or unconscious choice, represent the performance of gender roles (Hanna, 1988).

Even though contemporary dance is known as a style of dance which often challenges traditional gender roles (Aldbright, 2010), responses by various gatekeepers reflect that during auditions and castings for productions, cultural ideas of gender still inform their decisions. For example, Rehearsal Director 6 discusses how females are not able to lift men in dance performances and that there are obvious roles and steps which are assigned to the different genders due to physical capabilities and differences of strength. Her views reflect a reliance on traditional representations of being female and male in dance especially during partner and duet work.

The idea of the romantic relationship duets has been borrowed from classical ballet and is still used in contemporary dance, providing opportunity for the performance of gender roles (Saura, 2009). Saura (2009) argues how gender stereotypes have been always seen as influential tools "for the production of chorographical meaning" (Saura, 2009, pg. 38). Contemporary dance is one of the few artforms relying purely on the physical body for communication and representation and more importantly it challenges the concept of identity like no other artform due its capability "of being both very abstract or very literal" (Albright, 2010, pg. 4). A few respondents emphasised how their work is abstract and therefore asexual, however, whether intentionally or not "movement serves as a marker for the production of gender" (Desmond, 1993, pg. 36) therefore thus cultural and social distinctions and characteristic of the individual's identity, both as a dancer and as a human being cannot be completely separated. This discussion reflects back to the idea of objectification of the body as existing separately from the self (Aalten, 2004). Nevertheless, contemporary dance can be used to challenge ideas of gender as it allows for gender representations to be negotiated and embodied as the ideas perceived by the audience can be manipulated through the choreography and artistic choices (Albright, 2010).

As an added demarcation of gender, the concept of sexuality was shown to have an influence on casting practices, especially when for a specific character role. Speaking from her experience of working under a specific choreographer, Rehearsal Director 6 relates a situation where the director had conflicts with a male identifying dancer for not being *masculine* enough in his dancing while portraying a role due to him being a homosexual. The Rehearsal Director 6 went further to emphasise how even though the way of communicating was not ethically correct, she felt it was important that the dancer is able to portray the role as the choreographer wants him/her to portray reflecting the way that predisposed ideas of sexuality can affect the hiring of a dancer specifically when there is a literal role. According to Risner (2002), gatekeepers can be quick to make assumptions based on the sexuality of the dancer and the ability to perform traditionally masculine gendered movements.

Even though homosexuality is overrepresented in the dance field compared to other professions (Bailey, 1997), these comments from Rehearsal Director 6 reflect that a homophobic culture still exists within the dance world and can take a significant role in production processes (Risner, 2002). Gard (2006) addresses the commonality of hetero-sexism performed by choreographers in name of their work reflecting a heterosexual couple duet. Such stereotypes on the male dancer and the influence of sexuality equally reflect the maintenance

and reproduction of traditional ideas of gender and masculinity as well as the old fashion view of dance as a practice of femininity (Aalten, 2004), performed by females and to be watched by a male audience (Polasek & Roper, 2011).

Misconceptions and assumptions on sexuality and performance of gender roles stretches further to aesthetic aspects in Choreographer 9's comment, "Men should not look like females (..) But they do sometimes (.) I think that's not good, but it's their own choice". Such comment is problematic as it reflects misogynistic tones and stereotypes on how male dancers should look and behave (Polasek & Roper, 2011) and reveals how gatekeepers are influenced and reproduce cultural ideas of gender roles.

Another way sexuality comes into play in the influence of gender in audition practices and castings is through hidden criteria of sensuality. A few male identifying gatekeepers, admitted being attracted to female identifying dancers in a different way than when compared to male identifying dancers due to these gatekeepers themselves being heterosexual males. According to Hanna (2010), sexuality is interlinked with dance due to the similarities of how sex and sexuality and dance use the body as mean of expression and pleasure. Dance has the ability to enchant and emotionally involve the spectator in a way that might suggest sexual themes however the way sexuality is present in dance depends on context and point of view of the spectator (Hanna, 2010). Due to this, it is understandable that attraction differs for each gender due to the sexuality component within every human being however its use and role in auditions and production practices is questionable and problematic. An added aspect of sexualization of the female body in auditions is seen in a comment by Choreographer 8 on how choreographers used to ask her to change clothes to shorts in order to see the body when she herself was a professional dancer. In such situations, the power relations are strongly established specially in an audition or rehearsal and puts the dancer in a situation where refusal is ill advised due to the possible career consequences. DaSilva (2021) shows that speaking up or making objections is not something taken lightly in the dance field and can even lead to punishments such as being taken out of performances or even not get their contracts renewed.

Due to this strong affiliation with sexuality, the ethical and moral lines between symbolic expression in performance and what happens off stage can be abused and manipulated (DaSilva, 2021). The body, especially of female dancers is constantly objectified and sexualised by those in a position of power which unfortunately has led to an innumerable number of stories of sexual abuse within the professional dance field (DaSilva, 2021).

4.2 Cultural reproduction of ideas on race & ethnicity

When the themes of race and ethnicity arose in the interviews, gatekeepers showed different levels of understanding of the role race and ethnicity plays within the contemporary dance world. Most participants addressed the concept of race and ethnicity already when discussing aesthetic features of appearance. I noticed immediately the discourse becoming more defensive as various gatekeepers expressed how they never make distinctions based on skin colour or where a person is from. This defensive response is seen for instance with Choreographer 9 when he discusses his decision making in auditions;

> "Doesn't matter. Same with the sex same with the colour, it's what they do, (.)it's not about brown hair blonde hair dark skin white skin, man or woman. It's the same thing for me" (Choreographer 9, male)

Most gatekeepers showed an initial open and positive attitude towards the concept and idea of diversity and equality however, looking further into the answers to later questions or imbedded implicitly in their answers, the respondents showed to have an immature and vague understanding of what diversity actually entails. Such attitude is commonly seen in individuals when discussing diversity as there is an under developed notion of the concept and what it means for them as individuals in one society (Bell & Hartmann, 2007).

Such vague understanding of diversity was mostly given away through generic kind of answers such as that above of Choreographer 9. Another example is given by Choreographer 4 on how he views the role of race and ethnicity in auditions;

> "I put on my antenna to be inspired. And then, yeah, then we will see what happens (..) And this antenna doesn't know (..) this colour yes and that colour no… you select so when you select, you, you choose to discriminate actually (.) selecting as discrimination uh?" (Choreographer 4, male)

Such kind of responses are not only vague and defensive but also provide a safe way to express disagreement with affirmative actions in the form of colour-blindness (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011).

Colour-blindness might seem like a positive ideology in favour of diversity however, it also ignores the difficulties and institutional disadvantages that non-white individuals face in their daily life (Frazer-Carroll, 2020). Such discourse also introduces connotations of the concept of abstract liberalism discussed in Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich (2011). This is, the use of abstract and out of context language and discourse natural of the liberalism ideology in order to seem morally correct and when discussing issues relating to actions towards race (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011). For example, by suggesting we all discriminate when making selections, Choreographer 4 is excusing himself and distributing responsibility. Such comment ignores the fact that different individuals can be judged on different criteria such as on the basis of race and ethnicity.

From the interviews it was evident that the majority of the choreographers do not specifically seek to hire dancers of a particular race or ethnicity in order to express their artistic vision, except for one respondent. Choreographer 4 comments:

"In my case, I'm like (.) is highly subjective. (.) I like things that are not very close to me. (.) I tend to uh, to have a better conversation with somebody that is from another country than from somebody from my own country (sic). But as a metaphor, maybe… Yeah, I think that there is a good match between me and Asian people." (Choreographer 4, male)

This kind of selective preference suggest clear influence of racial and ethnical aspects in hiring of dancers which in turn is a form of positive discrimination. While legal in specific circumstances, positive discrimination in the Netherlands is only justified with the purpose of diversifying and aid a disadvantaged group, which in this situation, it is not the case (Netherlands Enterprise Agency, 2021).

When comparing to the classical world, respondents believe that the contemporary dance field is much more open in representing minorities, however lack of available dancers of a minority background make diversification harder. Respondent 5 discusses the lack of availability of dancers of different racial and ethnical background.

"I think from those 150 men that applied I think maybe (.) three or five or were people of colour, so that means it just by percentage not even 1%, (..) uh (.) or kind of, yeah, I wanted that 2% three out of 150. It a very small selection window, so the chances that, that out of those 3% you would find the right candidate when you only have two openings (.) It just a very small percentage." (Choreographer 5, male)

Evidence does show dancers of minority background, especially Black dancers, are under-represented in the contemporary dance field (Keenan, 2017; King, 2020), yet more efforts should be made to increase representation. Various gatekeepers emphasise how the quality of the work should not be jeopardized for the sake of diversity, which reflects opinions on diversity are largely based on assumptions of for example, that diversity efforts will lead to the quality of the choreography to be jeopardised (Bell & Hartmann, 2007). Additionally, most gatekeepers positively discuss efforts of diversification however, later responses suggest their actions and reactions reveal they fail to actually implement such efforts. Research by Bell & Hartmann (2007) discusses how such happenings are common as individuals seem to fail to actually embody and engage with what they preach to believe about diversity. Many vouch for diversity yet prefer to distance themselves from political and cultural issues such as equality and racial concerns, which in turn create cultural blind-spots where little change can actually occur and racial differences will still be emphasised (Bell & Hartmann, 2017).

The lack of availability of dancers from a minority background creates frustrations for the gatekeepers, especially due to increasing pressures from subsidies and governmental support for diversification of dance companies and ensembles (Fonds Podiumkunsten, 2020). According to the Performing arts fund, Fonds Podiumkunsten, the movement of the Black Lives Matter and the killing of George Floyed served as a strong motivator for a change and total reform of cultural institutions of the performing arts sector– putting pressure on the field to become more and more diverse in relation to race and ethnicity and better represent a multicultural population (Fonds Podiumkunsten, 2020). The Fonds Podiumkunsten (2020) argue the best way to ensure appropriate performance arts institutions which best reflect a multicultural society is through the implementation of policies and attribution of funds to those who best support and stimulate the development of artists who perhaps are less visible and disadvantaged. By keeping their main mission of providing the best quality and versatile representations of performing arts with maximum reach, the fund commits to also provide opportunity for different perspectives to be heard (Fonds Podiumkunsten, 2020).

Such pressures from the funding organizations and the public have led to feelings of confusion and frustration among the majority of the respondents. Choreographer 4 describes being asked to recommend a dance teacher who is not white, not male and not heterosexual. Confused and uncomfortable, respondent 4 states;

"I was really confronted. I didn't understand what I was hearing…I have no distinction between (.) all these colours and all these uh (.) I can give you for sure names of people that I think are good dance teachers. But I will not look with the lens of gender and race (..) I think it's dangerous because art should really not be busy with this" (Choreographer 4, male).

Even though such situation was not directed towards the hiring of a dancer but a teacher, it does describe the way some institutions in the field are dealing with diversity initiatives in a problematic way. The implementation of such efforts should be carefully monitored and made sure proper implementation as to avoid any difficult situations like this.

Furthermore, the understanding that art should not be involved with issues of diversity and equality in society, reflects the traditional idea of "art for art's sake" and the separation of the artistic vision and individual and the social, economic and political aspects have been seen as a threat to the pure artistic expression (Johansson & Lindström Sol, 2021). By claiming this separation, the gatekeepers put their art on a pedestal and in turn create a safe place where they can operate without dealing with the difficult task of achieving the ideal of social equality (Johansson & Lindström Sol, 2021). The protected status of the artist encourages the avoidance of responsibility and the distribution of blame to the political sector.

From the point of view of various respondents, integration initiatives such as the need to hire an x number of dancers of a certain background in order to attain subsidy from the government, are in general negatively perceived by the respondents and perhaps might even increase the issue and create resentment and negative feelings. Research has criticised such initiatives as, "Integration initiatives and diversity interventions are found ethically problematic because they mainly contribute to perpetuating sameness, highlighting the disadvantages of 'others' rather than supporting them" (Johansson & Lindström Sol, 2021, pg. 3). Additionally, such initiatives are seen as only serving the purpose of representation and tokenism, masking the underlying problem of inequality within the organization (Johansson & Lindström Sol, 2021). Scott (2005) believes it is essential for organizations to undergo an

overall reform towards becoming more diverse, meaning in a wide range of positions rather than a narrow focus on diversity based on representation and tokenism. For instances, diversifying all positions in the administration and management of cultural institutions as well as the artists (Scott, 2005).

Gatekeepers expressed how some directors or choreographers engage in typecasting practices on the basis of race and ethnicity not only as a safety net for success, but also to meet diversity expectations in the form of tokenism. Choreographer 8 explains a situation where her partner witnessed clear typecasting practices which reflected racial marking and tokenism.

> "Yeah, but everywhere they do that, like we were now in America, and, and my husband was doing a piece and they were like, this girl (.) Is there because they needed a black and female, girl. (.) so they checked two boxes, female, check, and black, check. So yeah they do this a lot. (.) I think almost in every company." (Choreographer 8, female)

By implementing such practices, gatekeepers fail to implement proper diversity and representation initiatives as typecasting still perpetuates such racial differences (Dean, 2005). Choreographer 8's comment indicates again the understanding of how the race of an individual is perceived not as a social construct in need of being addressed, but as an add on quality of the dancer part of a diversity check list. This notion connects to the idea previously discussed that the body of the dancer is perceived as a tool for artistic means rather than an individual. Thus, this notion reflects again the idea of the objectification of the body as an entity separate from the self (Aalten, 2004). This separation is not only dangerous but also allows for injustices and racial discrimination in the name of the artistic expression (Johansson & Lindström Sol, 2021).

In the following section, I discuss the impact of artistic freedom of expression and the conflicting role of diversity and equality initiatives.

4.3 Artistic Freedom vs. Diversity principles

When discussions of diversity began, the gatekeeper's responded in positive connotations in regards to diversity. For instance, gatekeepers discussed the wish to provide opportunities for all regardless of gender, race and ethnicity. Nonetheless, such answers were always accompanied by criticism or argumentation on the basis of the artists freedom to choose whoever he/she wants to work with. This can be seen for instance in the comment by Choreographer 1;

"I'm against, of course, against treating people in a different way, according to their background and their ethnicity and everything. (..) But at the same time, I think directors should have the freedom to uh (.) to choose to choose who they want" (Choreographer 1, male)

Choreographer 1 addresses diversity and equality in a generic and positive way before criticising the implications and threats perceived towards an artist's own freedom of expression. According to Bell & Hartmann (2007), when discussing diversity, individuals usually make sure to address the concept in a positive manner, but find it easier and more comfortable discussing the difficulties associated with diversity. This way, their views can be safely expressed in a way that might be more acceptable or even perceived as morally correct (Bonilla-Silva, 2011). Furthermore, this quote from Choreographer 1, gave insight into the emerging theme of artistic freedom, as gatekeepers all seemed to be highly critical of how exactly diversity is practiced in the field.

Artistic freedom is the individual right of freedom of expression in any artistic form desired (Tanasescu, 2011). The concept of artistic freedom creates conflicts with ideals on equality and systemic discrimination (Johansson & Lindström Sol, 2021) specifically since artists have recently been subject to more and more government intervention in efforts to increase diversification of the performance art field (Fonds Podiumkunsten, 2020; Johansson & Lindström Sol, 2021).

In order to appeal to the highly competitive governmental funding initiatives, the respondents feel their work is highly judged under a rigorous diversity and equality checklist – which according to the respondents includes, hiring individuals of a certain race and ethnicity. Government funds and diversity initiatives like the kind mentioned by the gatekeepers, are a form of *affirmative actions* – as in practices focused on improving employment opportunities for those of a disadvantaged or minority group (Cuyler, 2013).

Gatekeepers showed a lack of understanding and much frustration in the way such actions were taken as they view these initiatives to threaten their position in the field and artistic freedom. Research has shown that even with much successful and positive evidence for the implementation of affirmative action policies, many still mistakenly believe such actions lead to the hiring of underqualified individuals in name of diversity (Cuyler, 2013). Especially for the arts, affirmative actions would aid in not only diversification of the field but also the development of new progressive talents. (Cuyler, 2013).

Choreographer 9 argues a commonly shared perspective on how quality is the most important aspect that you should judge on, and such quality is not judged on the race of the individual but on the individual him/herself. I found this argument to be questionable specially since there is evidence gatekeepers usually base their decisions on intuitive feelings and aesthetic characteristics as high quality is already expected since most dancers come from professional dance education or have previous working experience in the field (Sorignet, 2004). Moreover, such view undermines the power and influence of one's own predisposed ideas and bias of race and ethnicity and how they are systemically ingrained in institutions (Fischer et al., 2017). The assumption that such actions will result in lower quality is not only false but can be interpreted as an excuse to mask his own unconscious prejudices and threat to his own dominating status as a white male choreographer in the field (Bourdieu, 1979).

The aesthetic quality of a work of art has been the only ethical value considered worth pursuing, until social and cultural diasporas such as the #Metoo and the Black Lives Matter have forced cultural institutions to reflect on their own systemic discrimination (Johansson & Lindström Sol, 2021). However, not all artists are following such movements due to many believing in the necessary separation of the artist and the organizational and management duties of the organization (Johansson & Lindström Sol, 2021). It is this belief of art above all else that might create conflict with diversity initiatives – more questionable behavior will be excused by the right of artistic freedom. Such notion minimizes the value of dance as an artform in communicating, reflecting and influencing our deepest beliefs, wishes, values and morals (Smiers, 2003). It minimizes dance as an artform based purely on beautiful experiences of individuals moving and devalues it's social and cultural role (Smiers, 2003).

Some respondents showed an even more narrow view of the impact of such ideas on diversity and artistic freedom, and are unaware of the impact it can create in those disadvantaged communities, as well as limiting themselves to the opportunities that might arise both artistically and culturally from being more engaged in diversity initiatives.

Choreographer 3 is highly critical of diversity initiatives due to their impact on her artistic freedom;

> "I think that even sometimes I have less (.) chances to get a job because I am white (.) And okay, it's good I'm a woman, maybe that will be a good thing (.) …you really see now that if you are not busy with ethnical things or working with people who ((ethnic)) get you don't even get a chance" (Choreographer 3, female)

Choreographer 3's frustration is in some form understandable as competition for funding is getting higher in contrast to less funding for all artists however, she does miss the bigger picture of why such organizations focus on providing subsidies to choreographers of other race and ethnic background, who without such supports might not even exist. This type of language not only elicits frustration, privileged connotations and cynicism but is also a form of rhetoric racist language which further reproduces inequality structures. This kind of reaction reflects the concept of symbolic boundaries as "the lines that include and define some people, groups and things while excluding others" (Lamont et al., 2015, pg. 1). Symbolic boundaries are the base of inequality and differences in power relationships (Lamont et al., 2015). Due to high competition, individuals differentiate themselves and discriminate from other groups thus promoting unjust classifications and encouraging inequality regimes (Lamont et al., 2015).

In contrast to this perspective, a few gatekeepers discussed how diversity provides opportunity and inspiration for their work and choreographic language by using their artistic practice to showcase and encourage further diversity in the field. Choreographer 10 describes looking for dancers who embody their own cultural background in their movement quality;

> "I've been really drawn to lineage (.) their history (.) and their movement history first of all their cultural history, I love that (.) I think it's interesting… diversity interests me because I love movement in general but I think it's more of their lineage (sic) their ethnography their movement ethnography" (Choreographer 10, male)

It is worth noting choreographer 10's work is very much inspired by his own experience and ethnic background therefore it seems only natural he will look for individuals who reflect that artistic vision. Nevertheless, such specific way of looking for dancers is in a

way a form of affirmative action which will eventually lead to a more diverse cast and ensemble (Cuyler, 2013).

Johansson & Lindström Sol (2021) support this notion on how diversity can be a form of inspiration and aid in the development of the field rather than restrict it, but unfortunately the consumption of this artform lacks diversity. The audience of dance is still predominantly white/Caucasian and consumed mainly in the west (Glow et al., 2020) meaning gatekeepers are more likely to rely on the field's conventions and what the audience demands to see. Research studies have shown that a lack of such diversification is partially due to a resistance to change whether on or off the stage (Glow et al., 2020), and such change and development can only happen when such fundamentalist ideals of artistic freedom and "art for art's sake" are challenged (Smiers, 2003). In order to find the right balance of diversity efforts and maintaining freedom of expression, gatekeepers need to become more critical and understanding of their own predisposed ideas of gender, race and ethnicity and how they affect and influence their own decisions. Besides that, these subsidies are trying to solve an issue already too late in its development. Many believe such issues should be tackled already in the education system before the dancers are in the labour market (Kourlas, 2015).

4.4 Education and its impact on cultural reproduction

The contemporary dance field, according to the gatekeepers is fairly broad in styles influences and types of organizational structures – from theatre companies to freelance projects. Most of the respondents have experience in both these kind of organizations within the field as well as an extensive background as professional dancers themselves.

It became evident that all gatekeepers draw on their education and professional experience as professional dancers in the field in the way they approach their own work and choreographic practice. The emphasis on their past experiences gave me insights into how their education has shaped the way these gatekeepers view the various concepts discussed in this research. Professional dance training means the learning and imbedding of cultural ideas of aesthetic standards, gender roles and racial demarcations, meaning individuals embody such standards and expectations from early socialization in their early years of training (Saura, 2009; DiAngelo, 2016). Not only is this process expected by those active in the field but also considered essential in order to achieve success (Bourdieu, 1979). Socialization

therefore can be described as the process of learning a culture as well as its norms and values (DiAngelo, 2016).

Most of the respondents came from a highly technical education and training based on the classical ballet technique and educational practices. The reproduction of cultural ideals of aesthetics, gender and race and ethnicity in auditions by the gatekeepers is due to the habituation of practices witnessed and ingrained in professional dance education and training in their earlier years (Nash, 2003; Bourdieu, 1979).

The socialization of aesthetics, gender and race standards habituated from old mentalities and ways of training is seen to also implicitly inform the hiring of dancers and the kind of criteria imposed on them. Choreographer 5 demonstrates being very well aware of such processes of socialization and illustrates how, from his experience, he has noticed how some gatekeepers imposed their habituated practices onto the next generation of dancers through teaching and audition practices.

"We've all passed through so many filters of our dance teachers when we were seven years old or the other gatekeepers in the education system that already filtered certain types of bodies, so that by the time we encounter each other in the professional field we're, we're (sic) already selected whether we (.) are aware of it or not." (Respondent 5, interview 5)

These cultural filters are internalized into thinking patterns from an early age therefore, these notions also become extremely difficult to challenge (Bourdieu, 1979).

The main curriculum and merit system have an impactful influence on the development of the pupil, yet it is the hidden curriculum within such organizations which silently promotes and teaches specific cultural ideas of aesthetics, gender and race which are then reproduced to the next generations (Stinson, 2005). The education system as described by DiAngelo (2016) can be compared to an iceberg, with the formal main curriculum as the visible part of the iceberg and the cultural and social "hidden curriculum" as the part of the iceberg which is submersed under water – unnoticed but far larger and more impactful than the top.

In the dance world this is specifically evident as such socialization is actually visible in the body. The dancing body represents both the symbolic, meaning its representational value in society, and the material, understood as an instrumental view of the body (Aalten,

2004). The daily rigid and repetitive training is essential in both the material formation of the body and symbolic embodiment as dancers physically embody the cultural ideas imposed onto them (Aalten, 2004). Choreographer 5 goes further on this matter;

> "…they take those pressures on with them into their careers and into the professional environment, even if they're in immediate surroundings that doesn't ask them to look like that or behave like that, but it's already ingrained in them from younger age, so it's sometimes hard to let go of, even if you're in a safer environment that accepts you for the way you are." (Choreographer 5, male)

The choreographer discusses how gatekeepers carry the cultural predispositions from their classical education system with them onto their own practice in the contemporary world. Supporting such notion, Aalten's (2004) ethnographic research of dancers reveals that aesthetics pressures imposed on the dancers by teachers and directors are higher in females, with females having more pressure overall in moulding their body into the ideal aesthetic. Robinson (2021), goes further on this matter and discusses how such pressures imposed by the gatekeepers are even higher in the context of race as Black ballerinas are expected to shape their body into an image and ideal that has continuously excluded them. Robinson (2021) states how dance critics of have developed a racialised rhetoric which excludes the body of Black ballerinas due to their bone structure and skin colour not fitting to the classical aesthetics. This kind of rhetoric creates dangerous consequences for the Black dancer and all underrepresented communities which try to fit to the same aesthetic ideal (Robinson, 2021).

Previous education was additionally found to influence how gatekeepers viewed gender roles in their work. Compared to those who started training at a later stage or who began their career in contemporary dance based training, the gatekeepers shared divided views. Some sharing similar cultural views natural of the classical ballet world and others actually criticised them and attempted to challenge such ideas.

Choreographer 9 showed a more traditional view of the gender roles in dance which has been absorbed in his strict education and experience of classical and neo-classical ballet.

> "My education was like this so I grew up like this. (.) So now (.) even when I create a duet or something, I am always still thinking about the girl how I can support her more,

44

or most of the time I'm standing behind her. (.) Of course it is not anymore from this time… (Choreographer 9, male).

Classical ballet is extremely female oriented where the female dancer is the ultimate perfect pure image of femininity (Aalten, 2004). The female ballerina is fragile, precious and in need of support of the male partners. This romanticization of the female role in classical ballet limits the image and understanding of what a female dancer can be and accomplish (Turk, 2014). Showing a link between gender ideas and appearance, Choreographer 9 also comments; "Men should not look like females (..) But they do sometimes (.) I think that's not good…". This, further reveal the choreographer's more traditional view of the gender roles in the field. He proudly expresses his views and notions on gender and aesthetics and their role in the artform, revealing further implications as the choreographer expresses no awareness of the consequences of such beliefs on those who do not fit to these ideals.

Another group of gatekeepers are now challenging this mentality and using their experience and education as a reference point of change and development of their own artistic career. About half of the gatekeepers interviewed are directly challenging their previous education by actively engaging with their dancers in a more personal way such as focusing on personality and authenticity related characteristics of dancer when hiring.

Because they have witnessed and suffered through wrongful and unhealthy judgements on aesthetics, gender and race in their education system, they have now chosen to consciously move towards a more inclusive direction in their work. For example, Choreographer 10's inspiration for his artistic work and work ethic in relation to the hiring of dancers is highly influenced by his cultural and ethnical background and education as well as the challenges he faced when working in a large contemporary dance company. He states:

"I didn't see eye to eye with so uh I was like no, I want to leave, and I think this is important that I do my own thing I want to choreograph. Especially when you're battling institutions that are not willing to change" (Choreographer 10, interview 10).

Burt (1998) reveals how historical efforts to challenge the old structures and institutions have not been historically acknowledged until the late 90's, due to the slow development of institutions within the dance field and the resistance of gatekeepers to divert from the traditional practices. Large dance institutions have an essential role in dictating the

quality of the artform, whether they make judgements on the dancers or on the taste within the field (Bourdieu, 1979).

In relation to ethnic and racial diversity, the respondents believe the reform has to start in these education institutions. According to Bourdieu (1979), institutions of education do not promote equality but the opposite. It is a place where differences between individuals are imposed and emphasized. The respondents believe both schools and professional organizations need to be responsible and focus on increasing accessibility and attractiveness of professional dance education in communities of minority racial backgrounds. By doing so, the respondents hope for an increase in professional dancers of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. According to Cuyler (2013), affirmative action policies would be extremely effective in arts education in order to make sure diversity initiatives can make an impact already in youth. Thus, by the time those future gatekeepers are in the professional field, they will have another form of education which promotes diversity and equality over traditional predisposed cultural ideas. An example of such actions would be to implement a more inclusive curriculum which is sensitive to the multicultural influences in dance heritage which are often ignored leading to appropriation (King, 2020).

Contemporary dance is constantly evolving and taking inspiration from non-western dance styles such as Asian, African dance languages, yoga as well as hip hop and street dance which are closely related to Black culture (Kwan, 2017). It is important that the offer of dancers also reflects such influences and that educational institutions open up to start including non-western dance influences in their curriculum (Kerr-Berry, 2016). Additionally, choreographer 5 gave the example from his own company in how they focus on educational and outreach activities to make dance more accessible in marginalized communities by offering workshops and activities before performances in such communities. These kind of outreach activities will make sure neglected communities are recognized and engaged with and therefore aid in further diversification of the field (Cuyler, 2013).

Choreographer 10 was also highly vocal about how dance education should also educate its students and teachers correctly on the origin of different techniques which have now been appropriated in European-western dance. By doing so, it will encourage a more diverse form of socialization and general understanding of the history of the field (Kerr-Berry, 2004). Therefore, any educational programs as well as affirmative action policy in professional dance schools will eventually aid in diversifying the future labour force.

4.5 Power, hierarchy and the new way forward

During the interviews, gatekeepers shared views on how the contemporary dance field is organised, especially emphasising on the different power structures between the directors and the dancers. A common theme between most of the interviews was the belief that the hierarchical structure still prevails in contemporary dance companies and creates an environment of fear, mistrust and uncertainty.

"Yeah, the old fashion system that exists in theatre, you know, and I think it's still ultimately one of those things unfortunately, are based on power and uhm sometimes abuse of power in the respect to the people…it's super important that the arts in the dance world, the theatre world has a change of mind… you are dealing with people, you're dealing with sensitive people." (Choreographer 7, male).

Classical ballet companies are traditionally ranked in various levels of skill and talent however, with such rankings comes also power and perceived success (Carman, 2018). On the other hand, contemporary dance is thought by many as the polar opposite of the classical practice, offering less restrictive body ideals and more democratic structures of power (Sorignet, 2004). Yet, the gatekeepers believe there is still a hidden hierarchy in contemporary dance companies where the artistic director takes its place at the top of the hierarchical pyramid (Howard, 2020).

Even though there is no official ranking between the dancers, gatekeepers discussed an implicit gap between the director and the dancers which generates various organisational and structural consequences. For instance, difficulties in communication, increased power relationships as well as the encouragement of an environment of uncertainty for the dancers. The dance practice is a very sensitive, demanding and personal vocation (Aalten, 2004), and the dancers should be able to have the appropriate mental and physical support. The combination of lack of transparency (DaSilva, 2021), the protected and idealized status of the artistic director (Sayej, 2018) and uncertainty natural of an ever changing and demanding field creates anxieties for the dancers and encourages further negation of dancers own agency towards their career development (DaSilva, 2021; Cappelle, 2021). In relation to this, Kidd (2009) argues how organizations which value art as elite and above all social responsibilities, it provides opportunity for antidemocratic structures such as hierarchies to appear.

In efforts to address this, a few of the gatekeepers who are directors vouch for more transparency and communication with their dancers by taking on a collaborative multitasking approach where the dancers can feel heard and all round involved in the management and creative process.

Hierarchical structures not only increase power differences but also encourage the abuse and manipulation of such power (Cappelle & Gomes, 2020; Kidd, 2009). A few of the respondents described a culture of abuse, still existing in contemporary dance companies. For example, Choreographer 8 discusses being touched on the bottom by her former director. According to her, male identifying directors tend to address female identifying dancers by degrading and misogynistic names like "sweetheart", imposing further distance between their own position of power over the dancer (DaSilva, 2021). Choreographer 8 explains the lack of agency she felt working under an artistic director:

"…in the in ballet, it is. You shut up. And you cannot say anything, somehow, (.) I think, because it's very much in ranks. So, (.) but it happens also in contemporary (.) we are more open, we say we are more open …but no, I think it is still happening." (Choreographer 8, female).

The willingness to change the way power relationships exist in the field also reflects in the way these gatekeepers look for and hire dancers. For example, various gatekeepers expressed looking more for internal personal characteristics in the dancers and their ability to authentically perform the choreographer's movement style as well as be able to work in a collaborative way.

"I do very much look for, not only for the result of what, what a person looks like at that moment but I see their capacity to learn and process information… the general, the personality of the person (.) confidence and humility, need to be a good balance" (Choreographer 5, male)

A collaborative approach to the artform reflects a better implantation of democratic values, allowing for dancers to express their own voice and opinions (Kidd, 2009).

A few gatekeepers have also discussed how they are consciously changing the way they structure an audition in order to appeal to the anxieties of the dancers and transform the

practice into a more humane and personal experience. For example, choreographer 10 works extremely close with educational programs as a teacher and mentor in order to get to know his future dancers early enough and before they are professionals. He also provides week long auditions and interviews rather than just one full day in order to get a better sense of the individual as an artist and as a person. Other gatekeepers do auditions which are workshop based or by invitation to join a normal working day followed by interviews.

> "so we really are looking at our education programs, and we say oh my gosh maybe not now, but in two years, if that person is interested in working with us let's keep watching them for two years (sic)" (choreographer 10, male)

By providing a more personal and mentor like approach to the hiring of dancers, it also creates space and opportunity for predisposed ideas on aesthetic, gender, race and ethnicity to be challenged. It allows time for individual cultural bias to be challenged as well as avoidance of any assumptions and culture marking actions to happen (Schaap & Berkers (2019) and therefore a more honest evaluation of the dancer's personality and capabilities.

Especially since company's repertoires are more and more diverse in styles (Whittenburg, 2020), the audition process should also reflect that in order for gatekeepers to find the most adequate individual. For example by not relying on classical ballet class as the main style of training, but incorporate other styles such as contemporary class or improvisation class which focus mainly on expression (Sorignet, 2004). According to Whittenburg, "aside from ballet's cultural and historical associations, some dancers say it no longer serves the purpose of companies whose versatility is the main draw" (2020, para. 8).

It is worth noting that not all respondents shared the same view on audition practices and how such ideas on aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity influence them. A small number of gatekeepers deny there are any issues that need to be reflected upon when conducting auditions and the hiring of dancers. They believe the integrity and quality of their artistic work are above all else, and auditions are just an unfortunate part of the dance world. These gatekeepers discourse reflected tones of cynicism and ignorance especially in relation to cultural ideas of race, reflecting the symbolic boundaries they live by (Lamont et al., 2015). For example, a few gatekeepers expressed the wish for "things to remain the same" and do not understand the integration initiatives imposed on them.

"If it was up to me, I would just go on, like, I see the world like for me the racial difference in people from colour or white people or many women, or whatever" (Choreographer 9, male).

Grama & Todericiu (2016), explain how any change of an organizational culture is usually faced with resistance whether in the form of cynicism or belief that the organization is lacking integrity.

Further comments by Choreographer 9 reveal a resisting attitude towards the development of the field in terms of style to allow easier diversification of the field and the audience. In this quote, the choreographer is discussing how implementing hip hop and urban dance aspects is positively looked at by subsidies due to its ability to diversify the theatre and audience through the representation of other perspectives of performance art (Fonds Podiumkunsten, 2020). However, it is not completely clear whether the choreographer understands why the encouragement from subsides to include urban dance. He states:

"you cannot just do what you did on the street, you cannot just do in the theatre and do your tricks and that's the show, you know? This is not what it is, (.) you have to also be creative, how can you implement this to make it a real theatre show, because the theatre show is different than dance on the street…but it has to grow to a certain level because it's not on that level yet as contemporary dances or classical dances, because they exist (.) way longer." (Choreographer 9, male)

His clear separation of the quality of contemporary and classical ballet dances indicates his distinction of what is more symbolically prestige and what is not, reflecting old fashioned and elitist mentality common of the dance field (Bourdieu, 1979; Robinson, 2020). By imposing these assumptions, the choreographer 9 claims his place in his perceived hierarchy and separates himself from other groups, imposing a position of superiority, hence promoting the reproduction of inequality (Lamont et al., 2015).

Such mentality is reflected more in an older generation of individuals who have come from the classical ballet background and little experience in management and leadership of individuals in a vocational profession. Gatekeepers believe that in order for the contemporary dance world to evolve and improve in its history with abuse of power, the old generation of directors needs to change and give space for younger generation to make those changes.

4.6 Concluding remarks

Overall, the results showed that gatekeepers differ in how much they understand how cultural ideals of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity inform their decisions in hiring practices. The different topics and themes were thoroughly discussed and argued in order to answer my research question. The first topic to be addressed was cultural reproduction of aesthetics and gender, where I combined the themes of reproduction of ideas of aesthetics and reproduction of ideas of gender. This section revealed that aesthetic features serve as a direct criterion for hire in audition and production practices – specifically in relation to body types and features which represent the choreographer's or director's artistic vision. Moreover, this section emphasised how aesthetic standards imposed by the gatekeepers are very much gendered and therefore subject to further aesthetic pressures based on shared cultural ideas of gender. Additionally, from this theme the new subtheme of sexuality emerged. This addressed how sexuality and gender attributes were influencing the way gatekeepers hire dancers.

Afterwards, the theme of reproduction of cultural ideas of race & ethnicity was addressed combining the two themes of reproduction of ideas of race & ethnicity and cultural ideas of diversity. Here, I argued how some gatekeepers expressed rhetoric racial language and reproduce racial distinctions in their decisions due to the way race is seen not as a social construct but as an embodied quality of the dancer.

From the analysis, I have discussed the new themes of artistic freedom, impact of education, power and hierarchy and new perspectives of gatekeepers. The theme of artistic freedom served as a relevant emerging theme which explains gatekeepers' opinions on diversity efforts as well as offer a clarification of why gatekeepers are still heavily influenced by cultural ideas of aesthetics, gender and race and ethnicity. The theme of impact of education reflects an explanation for the way such cultural ideas are reproduced in institutions and down generations. Finally, the last topic of power, hierarchy and the new way forward, addressed the emerging theme of power and hierarchy and the theme of new perspectives. This topic ties down this thesis by addressing gatekeepers view on the organizational hierarchal culture of the field as well as explaining why development efforts are slow to take effect. This last section gives insight into gatekeeper's opinions of how the field should change in relation to the consequences of traditional opinions in the field. This reflects how

gatekeepers are challenging predisposed ideas of aesthetics, gender and race and ethnicity by challenging institutions and creating new ways of auditioning.

5 Conclusion

Within the world of contemporary dance, gatekeepers have the most marking and influencing roles in the field. They are the creative geniuses who aid or hinder the development of the contemporary dance field through the way they perform audition and production practices.

Within the contemporary dance field, the gatekeepers make aesthetic based assumptions and judgements on the dancers, influenced by the aesthetic conventions of the field, whether in body type or level of attractiveness. Not only do they look for specific aesthetic features but also gatekeepers rely on their own sense of attraction and intuition to make their decisions. This leads to the audition process being romanticized by looking for individuals who can inspire and enchant, or in their own words – make you fall in love. Such implicit criteria are not only problematic due to the romantic and erotic connotations but also suggests further objectification of dancer's bodies as instruments to possess.

Nonetheless, gatekeepers were found to challenge traditional ideals of aesthetics of the classical dance field by allowing for more diverse variety of bodies, however appearance-based criteria are still applied specifically that which follows the conventions of where they are in the field of contemporary dance. Gatekeepers were seen to search of edgier and weirder looks in order to elevate the quality of their artistic work, reflecting how the body of dancers is constantly objectified and perceived as a tool to be used and maneuverer in order to produce the final product that is the dance performance.

It became evident such aesthetic pressures were essentially gendered, revealing how females and males are subject to a different set of aesthetical standards imposed consciously or unconsciously by the gatekeepers. Gatekeepers were found to still rely on gender related attributes specifically with choreographic duets where binary representations of female and male are usual. Femininity and masculinity attributes were found to be relevant in audition practices especially since gatekeepers implicitly search for specific representations of being femininity or masculinity. In contrast, a few gatekeepers are also challenging such cultural ideas by being more open in the way they select on basis of gender, by performing abstract work where gendered representations can be negotiated by the public or the dancer. This view reflects a more humane understanding of the dancing body as a human body with its own habitus, feelings and agency.

Additionally, in relation to attributes of race and ethnicity, gatekeepers reproduce a form of colour-blind racism which allows them to continue to reproduce racial distinctions masked by frames of abstract liberalism. Moreover, latent content revealed gatekeepers view race as another quality or set of criteria added onto the body, rather than perceiving race as a social construct. From the analysis it became evident gatekeepers have a very material view of the dancers, as the body is viewed as instrumental to which aesthetics, gender and race are considered added qualities. This fragmented view of the dancer's body provides space and opportunity for objectification of the body as well as further implementation of cultural ideas and assumptions on the basis of aesthetic, gender and race ideals.

At the core of all decisions is their own artistic vision reflecting an idealization of the artwork. Here, the idea of art for art's sake is still very much expressed and idolized. Hence, gatekeepers unconsciously look for the dancer who embodies all the qualities (here meaning aesthetic, gender, race wise) necessary to best represent the gatekeeper's artistic vision. Thus, answering the main research question of; *How do cultural ideas of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity inform production and audition practices in the contemporary dance field in the Netherlands?*

This research gave insight into the essential role of the education system on how cultural reproduction of ideas of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity inform the decisions of gatekeepers in auditions. The attention should turn to professional dance schools and the systemic prejudices which are cultivated by the artistic staff members who still value the traditional system of the artform above diversity and inclusion developments. Various gatekeepers reflect a strong resistance to change and development in the field as such developments threaten the gatekeeper's privileged and protected position in the hierarchised system and status in the field. This reflects that contemporary dance is an ever-changing field operated by system very much stuck in its time.

Nonetheless, a few reflexive and progressive gatekeepers, understand how such systems and predisposed ideas are extremely difficult to challenge especially since they are being socialized early on from educational institutions. Therefore, they actively work to learn and challenge such ideals whether in the way they work or conduct auditions, providing a positive fresh and inspiring way forward.

The only way for the field to develop and challenge the influence of these cultural ideas is by a total change in mindset by providing space for the new generation of gatekeepers to properly address diversity initiatives through honest and humble communication and

understanding of differences in a multicultural society. Another recommendation discussed is that both educational institutions and professional institutions revise their curriculum and repertoire in order to properly address hindered cultural heritage of specific dance practices by acknowledging the diverse cultural history that is ingrained in dance repertoire.

Sorignet (2016) and Aalten (2004) view contemporary dance as "the liberation of the body" (Sorignet, 2006, pg. 1). They believe it provides the freedom of expression a more diverse variety of bodies and identities however they fail to acknowledge the significance of the process of socialization before gatekeepers reach their professional career. All the gatekeepers came from a career as a professional dancer therefore they all carry the cultural ideas taught by the hidden curriculum within vocational dance schools.

Furthermore, the theory fails to recognize discrimination is fundamentally a human and universal issue which should be challenged in all areas of one's life. The idea that arts and politics are two separated entities is therefore outdated. The arts engage with all aspects of social life and ones artistic ability should be used as freedom of expression but also with humility and sensitivity towards social aspects. Cultural diversity is as a democratic right as is artistic freedom (Johansson & Sol, 2021), therefore they should not be viewed as one hindering the other. Gatekeepers need to take responsibility for their role as tastemakers (Englis et al., 1994) and hence their power and influence on the field.

A limitation of this research was that all except one respondent were from a Caucasian background. It would have been fruitful for this research to have a larger and more diverse sample of respondents in order to have a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of gatekeepers of a minority background. It was evident that choreographer 10 who was the only bi-racial respondent, had a more critical perspective on the way cultural ideas of aesthetics, gender, race and ethnicity are represented in audition practices.

Another limitation was represented in the theory. Due to it being such a fairly new particular field, little research was found specifically on the contemporary dance field, especially in contrast to a wider variety of research on classical ballet. This forced me to result to news and magazine articles which in turn offer a more personalized account of dancer's stories. I made sure all these sources was corroborated to ensure their reliability as a source. Nevertheless, the theory available allowed for a clear contextual background to be made as my theoretical framework.

Moreover, it would be interesting for further research to do a comparative study between the gatekeepers' perspectives, audience perspectives and dancers' perspectives in

order to have the complete overview of where the issues are concentrated, and how they relate to each other. Additionally, a deeper research on organizational structures of professional dance institutions as well as educational institutions would be extremely beneficial for the development of the field. It would be advised educational institutions to also endure a reform in order to battle their systemic prejudices.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Hello, thank you for agreeing to participate in this study through Erasmus University of Rotterdam. With this interview I would like to know more about audition practices and how the hiring of dancers happens. I would love to get to know you a bit more and the different aspect of your work. You have received and signed a consent form, do you have any questions? One last question before we start, is it ok if I record this interview?

<u>Introduction</u>
- Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
- How long have you been working in the contemporary dance field?
- What made you want to become a choreographer?
- Gatekeepers like yourself are said to be tastemakers of the field. Do you see yourself as a taste maker within the field of contemporary dance?
- Can you explain what inspires you in your work?

Section for rehearsal directors:
- What brought you to this job?
- Could you please describe what you do at your job?

<u>Aesthetics & Aesthetic labour</u>
- Can you describe to me how you usually conduct an audition?
- When in an audition, what do you expect from the dancers?
- What are your expectations for how they should look and present themselves?
- What are the aesthetic stereotypes of dancers in the contemporary dance field?
- What do you think makes a dancer aesthetically beautiful?
- What do you look for when putting an ensemble together?
- How do you think aesthetics play a part in hiring and casting practices?
- Do you think some choreographers have a particular aesthetic?
- What is your opinion of choreographers hiring on the basis of a dancer's appearance?
- Why do you think such things happen?
- What usually attracts you to a dancer?

<u>Gender</u>

- How does that (what attracts you to a dancer) differ between female and male dancers?
- Classical ballet is known for being extremely female oriented. What is your opinion on contemporary dance and the role of the female dancer?
- What is your opinion on the pressures of fitting to a specific appearance between females and males?
- What is your opinion on gender differences in the contemporary dance field specifically in auditions and castings?

Race and ethnicity
- What is your opinion on the necessity of type casting?
- In which kind of situations do you think type casting is necessary?
- Do you know about the *code for diversity and inclusion*?
  - If not, read executive summary at the end of the guide
- What are your thoughts on this code?
- What actions do you think are necessary to deal with such issues? /Do you have any ideas in how to address such issues?
- Do you have anything else, you would like to share?
- Do you have any questions?

Thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview.

Executive Summary (translated):

Part of the potential audience is not yet attracted to the cultural offer. It should be a self-evident standard that the sector is equally accessible to everyone: as maker, producer, worker and public.

The Diversity & Inclusion Code therefore strives to create space for new stories, offer opportunities, including learning to think and act. Thus, the sector belongs to everyone. Everyone contributes in their own way. Everyone is appreciated for who he or she is, is respected and heard and feels at home!

Appendix B: Codebook

Code groups and codes

Artistic Freedom

Members:

○ Aesthetic depending on company ○ Artistic & personal values ○ Artistic choice over diversity ○ Awareness of preferences ○ Conflict with artistic vision ○ Focus on choreographic vision

Cultural ideas of diversity

Members:

○ About the code diversity ○ Age as an obstacle ○ Artistic choice over diversity ○ Challenging cultural ideas ○ Colour blindness ○ Dance heritage ○ Different style influences ○ Diverse Background ○ Diverse ensemble ○ Diversity in the field ○ Diversity of contemporary field ○ Equity in Opportunity ○ Ethnic preferences ○ Frustrated ideas on diversity ○ High quality over equality and diversity ○ hiring due to ethnicity ○ Ideas on race and ethnicity ○ Ignorance over racial issues ○ influence of ethnicity ○ Irony on diversity ○ less number of minority dancers ○ Looking for diversity ○ Miss understadning of the code ○ Necessity of Code ○ Necessity of type casting ○ Not diverse enough for subsidy ○ Opinion of ethnicity ○ Opinion on code ○ Previledge indications ○ Showing out of confort ○ Stereotype from nondancers ○ Type casting based on ethnicity ○ Type casting for storytelling ○ Understanding of stereotypes ○ Working with different bodies

Impact of Education

Members:

○ Auditions in schools ○ ballet vs. contemporary ○ High vs. Low Art ○ Impact of education ○ Influence of dancer's training ○ Influenced from other choreographers

New perspectives

Members:

○ Artistic & personal values ○ Attracted to personality ○ Audition as joining working day ○ Audition as workshop ○ Avoiding to explain own opinion ○ Background as a dancer ○ Based on human interaction ○ Begining of choreographic career ○ Behaviour of choreographer ○ Being critical ○ Being open ○ Careful look at CV + show reels ○ caring about wellbeing ○ Choosing from intuition ○ Close connection with dancers ○

70

Collaboration with dancers ○ Conflict in studio ○ Conflict with artistic vision ○ Democratic view ○ Development of the field ○ Focus on character ○ Influence in the field ○ Influencer of taste ○ Inspiration for work ○ Integrity of directors in choosing dancers ○ Intuitive Work ○ Looking for authenticity ○ Looking for creative and intelligent dancers ○ looking for dancers open to learn ○ Looking for dancers own approach ○ Looking for something special ○ Looking to connect artistically ○ New ways of auditioning ○ Old vs. New directors ○ Performance and skills ○ Personality of dancer ○ romantization of auditions ○ Seeking like minded dancers ○ sensitive to audition anxieties ○ Seperation of Art & Politics ○ Started choreographing as a dancer ○ Teaching & coaching ○ Trying not to judge on look ○ working with acquaintance ○ Working with different bodies

Power and hierarchy

Members:

○ Abuse of power ○ Power and hierarchy

Reproduction of ideas of gender and sexuality

Members:

○ Asexual work ○ Conflict gender role on stage vs. sexuality ○ Criteria varies between genders ○ Equity in Opportunity ○ Gender and Sexuality ○ Gender differences in field ○ gender differences of attraction ○ Gender Equality ○ Higher competition for females ○ Ideas on gender ○ Ideas on sexuality ○ Influenced by cultural ideas ○ More pressure on females ○ sexist and homophobic connotations ○ Traditional view on gender roles ○ Working more with females

Reproduction of ideas of race & ethnicity

Members:

○ About the code diversity ○ Challenging cultural ideas ○ Colour blindness ○ Defensive behaviour ○ Ideas on race and ethnicity ○ Ignorance over racial issues ○ Influenced by cultural ideas ○ Opinion of ethnicity ○ Previledge indications ○ Type casting based on ethnicity

Reproduction of ideas on aesthetics

Members:

○ Aesthetic depending on company ○ Analogy to being attracted to appearance ○ Appearance influencing decisions ○ Body aesthetic as a quality ○ Changing appearance ○ choreographer's type ○ Clothing and appearance ○ Different body types ○ Hygiene and appearance ○ Importance of appearance ○ Influence of Audience ○ judging on appearance ○ Judging on presence and movement ○ Out of norm appearance ○ Put-on appearance ○ Stereotype from nondancers ○ Type casting based on capabilities

Appendix C: Participant demographics

List of respondents	
Respondent 1	Choreographer, male, freelancer, ex-dancer, Caucasian/white – 1:07:30
Respondent 2	Rehearsal director, male, working in a company under a female director, ex-dancer, Caucasian/white – 45:21
Respondent 3	Choreographer, female, freelancer, ex-dancer, Caucasian/white – 56:30
Respondent 4	Choreographer, male, freelancer, used to have own company, ex-dancer, Caucasian/white – 1:05:19
Respondent 5	Choreographer, director, male, own company, dancer, Caucasian/white – 1:14:08
Respondent 6	Rehearsal director, female, working in a company under a male director, ex-dancer – 1:09:52
Respondent 7	Choreographer, director, male, ex-freelancer, own company, ex-dancer, Caucasian/white – 1:03:42
Respondent 8	Choreographer, director of own company, female, ex-freelancer, ex-dancer, Caucasian/white – 51:41
Respondent 9	Choreographer, dancer, male, Caucasian/white – 56:27
Respondent 10	Choreographer, director of own company, rehearsal director at big dance company, male, ex-dancer, bi-racial – Caucasian/Chinese – 1:10:52
Respondent 11	Choreographer, freelance, female, dancer, Caucasian/white – 48:46