Advancing Asian American and Pacific Islander Representation in the Nonprofit Concert Dance Industry

by

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"Our experience was much bigger than what was being called for. And we haven't even scratched the surface of how deeply we need to see ourselves represented." ~ Sandra Oh.

Anti-Asian sentiment has haunted the United States for centuries. With a history of being forced to work in subhuman conditions, cast as scapegoats for numerous viruses, and universally considered foreigners by too many of their fellow citizens, Asian individuals in this country have been targets of discrimination since the second half of the 19th century. The coronavirus disease that emerged in 2019 (COVID-19) marked a dramatic rise in Anti-Asian sentiment and actions, bringing this long-entrenched history of racism to the surface. As the world entered a period of global unrest and economic instability, "fear and uncertainty to [a] novel infectious disease, the presumptive origin of COVID-19, and the perpetual foreigner stereotype" made Asian Americans vulnerable to racism and disease scapegoating (Chen). The personification of COVID-19 as Asian people and the associations between the words "Chinese" and "virus" led to a violent increase in hate crimes against the Asian American community.

Although the increase in Anti-Asian hate crimes has left American families distraught and traumatized, it has also triggered what could be considered one of the very few positive outcomes of this pandemic, the Stop Asian Hate movement. This movement which started in

2020, consists of Anti-Asian violence rallies that have been held in response to racially motivated attacks on the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community. The erasure of AAPI's historical oppression, immigration experiences, rich and diverse cultural heritage, and contributions to scientific and social justice advancement in the United States has alienated this marginalized group of people. Widely held stereotypes that AAPI people are obedient, self-sufficient, phlegmatic, and not people of color, have added to the challenges the AAPI community face when asking for or needing assistance. Small businesses were most visibly impacted by the current onslaught of Anti-Asian sentiment due to the absence of support, fiscally and socially.

An industry where this type of discrimination against the AAPI community has not received deserved research or attention is the non-profit concert dance industry. While the arts field in general seldom uplifts and amplifies the voices of Asian American artists, the dance industry in particular lacks representation regarding the inclusion and celebration of AAPI artists. Without affirmation and reassurance that a dance or art career is a viable path for Asian Americans to follow, more of the AAPI community will lose interest in pursuing a career in the arts.

The aim of my senior project research paper is to advance the representation of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) in the non-profit concert dance industry including the genres of classical ballet, contemporary, and modern dance. Specific topics that will be explored are concepts such as the model minority myth; the effects of traditional Asian values on the AAPI community; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; and the current AAPI presence and treatment in the concert dance industry, among others.

In order to explore these topics, I conducted an interview with a professional AAPI dancer in the field, Raechelle Manalo, facilitated a focus group with a population of AAPI dancers in a dance conservatory program, and researched literature on AAPI representation in dance and other arts industries, the advancing of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in arts and entertainment, and the traditional values and educational goals of the AAPI community. By conducting my research using these methods, there will be a balance of qualitative data from current AAPI dancers which will provide information on how the concert dance industry treats this group of artists, and statistical and scholarly information that will support these personal emotions and experiences with substantial evidence.

The ethnic labels 'Asian American' and 'AAPI' are often considered inadequate due to their flaw of flattening and erasing entire cultures (Moloney). In the terms' most idealized versions, however, they have historically served as a unifying banner for an abundance of communities with shared experiences of xenophobia (Zhou). While individuals under the Asian American ethnic category are most often blamed for the pandemic, the term AAPI will be used in order to encourage solidarity. Essential terms and concepts foundational to this work are Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) encompassing acknowledgment, support, and acceptance of different racial, sexual, gender, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds among other differentiators (Nakintu). Diversity refers to the presence of different and multiple characteristics that make up individual and collective identities, while equity is the process of identifying and removing the barriers that create disparities in the access to resources and means, and the achievement of fair treatment and equal opportunities to thrive (Nakintu). Lastly, inclusion is the creation of environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to participate fully (Nakintu).

Fortunately, the Stop Asian Hate movement has initiated conversations and discussions about this minority group, one that was rarely recognized in the past. A group previously suffering in silence, is now able to raise their voices about how they should be represented in society and the rectifications needed to be made in order to achieve this. AAPI dancers are now a part of this movement, aspiring to a more healthy and equitable environment for them to practice their art.

Overview of the Nonprofit Concert Dance Industry in the United States

The non-profit concert dance industry supports multiple genres of dance including ballet, jazz, musical theater, tap, modern, contemporary, and more. This paper will center on the classical models of the industry, focusing on how westernized ideals have shaped the ballet, modern, and contemporary worlds. Generally, ballet companies in the United States operate as nonprofit organizations because of the lack of mainstream interest in the artform in part due to insufficient exposure in education or through public performance. The Survey of Public Participation in the Arts from the NEA affirms the population of U.S. adults attending ballet performances at least once a year is under 3% (National Endowment for the Arts). Since the expenses involved in producing a traditional performing art like ballet far exceed market demand, additional financial assistance is imperative in keeping the industry afloat. By becoming nonprofit, these organizations are understood by the IRS as tax-exempt and are allowed to incentivize donations, targeting affluent and arts interested audiences, foundations, corporations, and public means of support to receive maximum financial support.

Ballet has had an immense impact on creating the idealized version of a concert dancer. Originating over 500 years ago in the Italian Renaissance Courts, ballet was popularized and standardized by King Louis XlV, leading to a romantic era that explored the "supernatural world of spirits and magic" often showing women as passive and fragile (Pittsburgh). Due to the many beloved "story ballets" created in the 18th and 19th centuries (e.g. Swan Lake, the Nutcracker) that continue to be favored by standard audiences, ballet's ideal dancer is still associated with being thin and white. George Balanchine, also known as the father of American ballet, is said to be responsible for creating these standards, illustrating the exemplary dancer with unrealistic expectations (Greco). This concept of an ideal dancer is destructive and detrimental for any concert dancers scavenging for a job, since they are aware that the majority of concert dance companies will only hire artists with the specific ideal body they have in mind.

Asian American Neglect in Western Dance

The pioneers who led the way for AAPI dance artists today were, in most scenarios, excluded from mainstream accounts of dance history. Even while enduring years of discrimination and internment "in a country where people of Asian descent were not able to become citizens until 1952 or immigrate as freely as Europeans until 1965," AAPI artists were able to help shape dance in America today (Hsiao).

One of the most impactful AAPI artists in Western dance is Jadin Wong (1913-2010). Wong, a Chinese American actress, dancer, and comedienne, started her career as a busking, starving, and homeless artist on the streets of Hollywood, and worked her way up to appear in several films and Broadway shows, including *Mr. Moto Takes a Vacation, The King and I,* and

The World of Susie Wong. Wong is most renowned for creating Jadin Wong Management, a talent agency that represented over 400 AAPI performers, and "taking part in casting shows including *Flower Drum Song, South Pacific, The King and I* and *M. Butterfly"* (Hsiao). There also exists a Jadin Wong Fellowship that awards an emerging Asian American dance artist who hopes to make a significant impact on the Asian American artistic community (Programs). Throughout her life and even after her death, Jadin Wong took matters into her own hands and supported aspiring artists, musicians, and dancers of Asian descent, because no one else would.

Similar to Wong, another artist who has actively influenced generations of AAPI artists would be Yuriko Amemiya Kikuchi, known professionally as Yuriko (1920-2022). Yuriko, a pioneer in the development of contemporary dance, had a five-decade association with Martha Graham, the revolutionary dancer and choreographer who defied classical ballet norms. She supported the enlargement of the Martha Graham Dance Company and the level of dominance the company had over the emerging modern dance industry and the concert dance industry as a whole. After Graham's death, Yuriko went on to stage the choreographer's works on dance companies and student groups, and also resurrected early pieces that were considered lost, such as *Panorama* and *Chronicle*. According to New York Times dance critic Allen Hughes, "'Yuriko represents about as authentic an incarnation of the Graham technique and idiom as one could expect to find outside the creator of the originals'" (Smith). Her contribution to the establishment of the technique and the company is undeniable, and it is evident how the construction of Graham's legacy would not have been the same without Yuriko. As the first person of color hired by Graham, she contradicted the ideal ballet physical makeup as an Asian, small in stature, and short-limbed. This contradiction, as well as her achievements as a dancer, choreographer, and teacher, are the reason why AAPI dancers see Yuriko as an icon and one of their very few

symbols of hope and courage. However, despite Yuriko's contributions to the development of the Martha Graham Dance Company and the technique that survives to this day, she rarely receives credit, with the majority of audiences unaware of her existence.

The history of AAPI artists making significant impacts yet being neglected and uncredited continues to be an issue, leading to widespread ignorance of and appreciation of AAPI artists' work in dance. Fortunately, in recent years, there is a rise of a new generation who values their involvement in social movements and addressing social and political issues. This surge in activism is evidenced through movements such as the Black Lives Matter movement, the Women's March or the #MeToo movement, the #BansOffOurBodies movement, and the Stop Asian Hate Movement. Therefore, a rising generation of individuals who were not previously recognizant of AAPI discrimination and racism is now contributing to the current significant backlash Anti-Asian sentiment impacting many Americans.

As a result, an increase in awareness of the importance of encouraging AAPI artistry and creativity is evidencing needed industry changes. For example, there has been recent acknowledgment in 2023 for the Malaysian actress in *Everything Everywhere All At Once,* Michelle Yeoh, for her being the first Asian recipient of an Academy Award for Best Actress. In regards to the concert dance industry, Stella Abrera, a former American Ballet Theatre Principal dancer, became the first Asian Artistic Director of the American Ballet Theatre School. Current Abraham In Motion by Kyle Abraham dancer Keerati Jinakunwiphat choreographed *Fortuitous Ash* with a score by Du Yun for New York City Ballet (Wren). This work represents the first time that choreography and music by female artists of Asian heritage have entered the New York City Ballet repertory (Wren). Despite these accomplishments, the majority of AAPI dancers in the present day nonprofit concert dance industry are still not known to the general public, verifying

the perpetual issue of the lack of recognition for AAPI artists' work. Although there has been a modest improvement in appreciating their artistry, each achievement does not expunge the issue of utilizing AAPI labor for diversity and tokenizing purposes.

What is the Problem

The nonprofit concert dance industry is myopically and erroneously attempting to face and address a long dismissed history of racism, sexism, ableism, sizeism, and heterosexism. Even though some artists and administrators have made effective and constructive changes to unhealthy norms of this industry (especially considering the fact that most dance companies consisted of only white dancers with indistinguishable physical attributes in the past) the processes of diversification and altering the ideal image of a dancer is still generally addressed through strategies of malpractice.

Stereotypes, Microaggressions, and Typecasting

A form of racism that is harmful to minority demographics is stereotyping, a generalized belief or oversimplified image or idea of a particular category of people. These assumptions categorize diverse communities into a monolithic group, leading to a major type of discrimination that continuously and most commonly acts as a burden to an AAPI person's mental health: microaggressions. Derald Wing Sue, M.S., Ph.D., a professor of psychology and education at Teachers College, Columbia University, "defines microaggressions as slights and invalidations that people of color experience in their day-to-day interactions with well-intentioned individuals." These invalidations manifest the baleful stereotypes that view the

AAPI community as “perpetual foreigners, the model minority, and the yellow peril– the belief that Asians (particularly East Asians) pose a danger to Western values, power, and culture” (Ng). According to Dr. Warren Ng, another term for microaggressions is death by a thousand cuts, speaking to the cumulative effects that these remarks have (Ng). In other words, these seemingly small but destructive comments lead to the belief and feeling of being unwelcomed, similar to how AAPI dancers feel in an educational or professional setting. Raechelle Manalo, a former Paul Taylor Dance Company member was forced to endure microaggressive behavior when she was employed by a predominantly white company. Fortunately, there were two other Asian American women in the company who were able to keep Manalo grounded, but this did not change her decision to leave the company to join a less financially stable but more racially equitable and inclusive organization. The discomfort continued to build as a result of the microaggressive comments and the predominantly white space for Manalo, as many AAPI professionals in the field have experienced. Social discrimination and the inability to pursue a career in the concert dance industry without experiencing mild to extreme racism are one of the leading causes of AAPI feeling unwelcome or excluded compared to their Western peers in dance.

An example of exclusion because of race would be Georgina Pazcoguin, the only Asian American to be promoted to New York City Ballet Company’s upper tier in 2013. Pazcoguin was forced to wait ten years to perform the part of the Sugar Plum Fairy in George Balanchine’s *The Nutcracker*, although other white upper tier dancers received the role early on in their careers. Pazcoguin states “A lot of my casting is based on what I look like, not what I can embody. I would love to just be able to go in to work and be seen as the human I am, and have the possibility that I can” (Sturges). This form of industry malpractice is called type casting, and

it is a prime example of an AAPI dancer receiving inequitable treatment that is disrespectful and unsupportive, being denied certain key roles because of their racial features. The tendency for AAPI dancers to be erased or forcefully "faded off into the distance" is caused by the systemic and historical culture of the concert dance industry (Kourlas). Since AAPI dancers lack the idealized features and characteristics of classical roles, they are often held back within a company, and given fewer opportunities as artists. On top of these equity and inclusion issues, concert dance companies' superficial methods of advancing values of diversification are also problematic.

Tokenism

Tokenism, the practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do a particular thing, or hiring a person who belongs to a minority group only to prevent criticism and give the appearance that people are being treated fairly, is common in dance as well as other creative fields. An example of tokenism in dance is when an AAPI dancer is hired solely for diversification purposes, in order to attract more audiences interested in racially inclusive organizations and to maintain a positive reputation in the field. Since there are generally only one or two AAPI dancers in any concert dance company, the tokenized dancers are often used as publicity stunts to proclaim the company's diversification efforts.

While tokenism may provide opportunities that would not otherwise exist for minorities, being utilized in companies' publicity supports the company's financial and branding goals but will not solve the larger systemic issue at hand. Tokenism exacerbates external pressures already born by minority artists to represent the entirety of their underrepresented group instead of being able to share one's specific perspective and experience as a minority. Oppressed distinct groups

that are “lumped into one big monolith,” is a form of discrimination and silencing in and of itself (Clements). The distinct groups impacted by being lumped together under the category of Asian American or AAPI include but are not limited to South Asians, Southeast Asians, East Asians, and Pacific Islanders.

Tokenism has affected AAPI dancers in most professional settings. According to interviews conducted by Kristi Yeung, a great majority of professional AAPI dancers consider it typical to be one of the only Asians in a company or project, rarely having the chance to collaborate with other AAPI dancers (Yeung). Several of those interviewed for this project also expressed the impact of tokenistic practices on their self-confidence as a dancer, noting they were often unsure whether or not they were hired because of their talent, or because they needed an AAPI dancer. A dancer named Hannahlei Cabanilla described how they have been to numerous auditions where the dancers are asked to separate themselves based on how they look, and then are chosen out of those groups. It is evident that tokenism is a common issue in this dance industry, and therefore it is imperative that this field starts working towards debunking the idea that tokenization based on race is acceptable. There is a constant intersectionality between microaggressions, tokenism, and all other types of discrimination leading to the common result of AAPI dancers being obligated to overwork themselves in an effort to feel less invisible.

Impact and A Need to Respond

Due to the history of brushing off the microaggressions and discrimination because of the prejudice that, in part, contributed to the myth of the community as ‘model minorities,’ many AAPI dancers have not spoken up about the impact these forms of racism have had on them, resulting in a scarcity of sources regarding this topic. However, according to several interviews

with current AAPI dancers in training as well as professionals, it has become evident that the majority of this group of artists are continually asking themselves, ‘Do I belong here?’

The lack of healthy representation of AAPI dancers on stage and in any professional space challenges young dancers’ ability to envision career success. Those who were raised in the United States generally have a similar upbringing, often raised in a predominantly white area and feeling numb and/or oblivious to the racism that they have experienced. This oblivion is often a result of internalized racism, or the unconscious acceptance of a racial bias or hierarchy, which causes the unquestioned belief in negative stereotypes. Consequently, being in an environment where they were the only AAPI dancer in a studio is both common and normalized. However, once these dancers join fellow AAPI dancers or choreographers in an educational or professional space, they immediately realize how empowering and reassuring it is to be surrounded by artists who share their cultural and racial identity.

Unfortunately, the rarity of AAPI dancers who persist in the industry and arrive at the conservatory or professional level results in the insufficient number of emerging AAPI dancers who recognize the value of community and representation. This matter in question is caused by the inadequacy of awareness and acknowledgment for AAPI dancers, and how their mistreatment has been disregarded for decades. With little to no understanding or appreciation for the AAPI dancers who have struggled their way to the professional world, it is nearly unfeasible for the young generation to believe there is space for them. In order to address these impacts on AAPI dancers, it is essential to identify the causes that are contributing to the issue.

What is the Real Problem?

The issue of there being a lack of AAPI representation within the nonprofit concert dance industry is fed by social, cultural, and industrial contributing causes.

Societal Factors

The model minority myth, is considered to be a root cause of stereotyping and microaggressive behaviors most commonly damaging to the mental health of AAPI individuals. This myth consists of the misconceptions that AAPI people are "a single monolithic group, high earning and well educated, … face less systemic racism and discrimination," are hardworking, and docile (Jin). Contrary to popular belief, all of these stereotypes can be debunked with statistics.

The AAPI population is the fastest growing racial/ethnic group in the U.S., with over 22 million people, making up approximately 7% of the nation's population (Jin). According to a 2018 Pew Research Center study, Asian Americans were the most economically divided racial or ethnic group in the U.S., and there is clear evidence that there is extensive contrariety within the group (Jin). With people of South Asian, Southeast Asian, East Asian, Pacific Islander and other Asian descent, there is a perpetual lack of awareness about the multitude of ethnicities that comprise the AAPI community and their individual experiences. There are major economic disparities between ethnicities debunking the assumption that the entirety of the AAPI minority group is high earning and well-educated, in part due to disparities in education levels impacting diverse entities.

Additionally, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a demonstrable increase in hate crimes and violence against Asian Americans, proving that the group does not experience less systemic racism and discrimination than other minorities. According to a Pew Research Center survey of Asian American adults conducted in 2021, 32% feared someone might threaten or physically attack them, 27% experienced people acting uncomfortable around them, 27% have been subject to racial slurs or jokes, and 16% were told they should go back to their home country. This data was compared to Black, Hispanic, and Caucasian populations, showing that 52% of the Black population have experienced at least one of these four incidents, and so has 45% of the Asian American population (Jin). Ultimately, these assumptions about the AAPI population are entirely inaccurate, proving that this myth has been used as a racial wedge to minimize "the role racism plays in the persistent struggles of other racial/ethnic minority groups – especially black Americans" (Chow). According to Claire Jean Kim, a professor at the University of California, Irvine, "racism that Asian-Americans have experienced is not what Black people have experienced, however, this does not negate that Asians have been denied entry into the U.S., barred from gaining citizenship, sent to incarceration camps, and victimized as the group at fault for causing the global pandemic (Chow).

While the model minority is categorically false, nonetheless, the myth persists and impacts Asian employees in many fields including dance where expectations of AAPI dancers in the field are unrealistically high. With the presumptions associated with the AAPI community as hardworking, obedient, quiet, intelligent, and never in need of assistance, dancers are often excluded, ostracized or erased within both educational and professional settings. A dance conservatory student from a renowned institution in the United States mentioned how she experienced a teacher in the past giving her and another AAPI female-identifying dancer a

correction, saying that they need to work harder because authority figures in the dance world expect Asian people to work harder than others (AAPI Group). This comment illuminates the issue of what is often expected (if not always voiced) of AAPI dancers, and how some figures in the dance industry are perpetuating the falsehood based on long-standing stereotypes. According to Raechelle Manalo, a Filipino American dancer, "there is a discipline that comes with being a dancer, and then there's another layer of discipline that comes with the impression that we're (those of us who are identified as AAPI) supposed to excel in whatever we do" (Manalo). In other words, the drilling of oneself as an AAPI dancer has to be at a significantly higher intensity than Caucasian dancers in order to be seen in an equitable light, since they are expected to accomplish any task with little to no support. Manalo, during our interview, also discussed how the perpetual foreigner stereotype forces her to feel the need to prove the validation of her presence in many dance spaces.

Cultural Factors

Another contributing factor to lack of diversity and inclusion for AAPI in concert dance (and other creative industries) is the result of conflict between AAPI traditional values and other cultures' values. There exists an extremely narrow frame of success for immigrants from Asian countries because their native cultures often consider education as one of the only paths to mobility. Asian immigrant parents "fear that their children will experience discrimination in their careers. So parents shepherd their children into conservative, high-status professions in which they may be most shielded from potential discrimination by employers, customers and clients" (Lee). From their perspective, careers in medicine, engineering, law, and pharmacy will guarantee a stable life, while the arts are risky because they involve subjective evaluation.

Regrettably, this narrowing of what is considered success leads to the ostracization of those who could not or chose not to follow the artistic path.

Detachment from their ethnic communities and dentities results from the inability to meet cultural expectations, especially because of the harsh judgement that might come with disobeying parental hopes. Manalo believes the lack of AAPI artists in the arts industry undoubtedly has to do with the culture since for her Filipino culture, the stereotype that those of Filipino descent are hospitable leaves no option to pursue the arts. She mentioned how both of her parents are in the healthcare field, her brother is a physical therapist, and the majority of her family are not artists, creating a challenging environment for her to move forward in the path of the arts. Although her parents decided to support Manalo in this career, she knows several AAPI friends who were forced to choose a more lucrative career, particularly if they needed to support their family fiscally and emotionally. This cultural unacceptance of the arts, notably dance, as a career choice significantly decreases the number of AAPI artists who continue their artistic craft as a profession.

Industry Factors

The industrial cause of the insufficient number of thriving AAPI concert dancers would be the white-dominated and entrenched outdated conventions of concert dance as its own culture. The systemic presence of racism and elitism has long plagued the concert dance industry, supporting predominantly white spaces which tolerate the appropriation of certain cultural dance styles without the acknowledgment of their origins or cultural meanings. The acts of exclusion and exploitation in this industry can be traced back to the theory that ballet is the foundation of dance.

Ballet, a European dance form, evolved during the Italian Renaissance of the 15th century and was popularized by King Louis XIV of France. Ballet being defined as "the foundation of all dance forms is a Eurocentric view that dismisses the many [non-Western] forms of dance that do not rely on ballet technique," such as Afro, hip-hop, Hula, and others (Zheng). . Unfortunately, the concert dance industry was constructed upon this limited and exclusionary basis, leading to the creation of an elitist system advantaging the white, thin, wealthy.

As noted above, the ideal body has been illustrated to be white, thin, and roughly the same height, leading to the inability for dancers of color to be considered for roles or jobs that were initially reserved for white dancers. Additionally, the use of blackface and yellowface demonstrates the strong commitment authority figures had to only hire white dancers for most of the history of this art form. By application of color on the white dancers' faces and having them wear culturally appropriating attire in order to fit in roles representing non-white ethnicities in various story ballets, dancers of color had jobs expropriated from them and were deeply offended by the pure racism they were forced to endure. The intense preference to have white dancers perform on stage has influenced most dance companies and their employment processes, causing the dancers of color to be required to perpetually fight for the few positions left for them. Throughout history, the lack of AAPI representation in the concert dance industry has been ignored or disregarded in large party because there has not been enough research done on the discrimination and ostracization of AAPI dancers. After discussing the reasons why this issue is relevant and paramount, it is imperative that solutions or recommendations for how to improve the situation are considered.

Solutions

How to be Anti-Racist

Above all, the absolute root of the lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion in concert dance is racism. The systemic racism, racism that is embedded in normal practices, can only be rooted out if there is a consistent effort by all participants to be anti-racist. There are numerous factors to being an effective anti-racist. An essential and preliminary step is to gravely acknowledge and accept "that we've all been raised in a society that elevates white culture over others," along with the necessity to challenge those notions inside of oneself (Deggans). The identification and acceptance of one's unconscious bias is crucial in the process of understanding how extensively systemic racism impacts one's perspective, values and behaviors.

Another method to advance anti-racism in any setting involves educating oneself on the history of racism and anti-racism, in order to genuinely grasp the complexities of the issue. It is the responsibility of white people to educate themselves on how racism became internalized along with its many negative impacts on diverse individuals as well as training and performance spaces. A common occurrence in this society is racial gaslighting, "a form of psychological manipulation that makes people of color question their own experiences of racism" (Research Guides). The pathologizing of people of color when sharing their experiences with white supremacists occurs because of inadequate knowledge of the history of racism. The prolonging of inadequate comprehension indicates the everlasting upsurge in ignorance of racist offenses. Also, the ability to hold racist people accountable plays a substantial role in truly supporting people of color. Not being racist is not enough to improve the core of the issue. Therefore it is essential to take action and elucidate the powers of white privilege and institutional racism.

Effective methods can include active listening, confrontation, educating fellow white people, and more. Last but not least, championing Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) work, art, and businesses is a practice that can gradually dismantle the institutional and systemic barriers that have prevented the BIPOC community to be represented and supported fairly. Especially since white superiority is evident in essentially all realms of society, there stands a need for the elevation of BIPOC endeavors in order to reach an equitable place. Anti-racist practices are crucial in the process of uplifting BIPOC voices, especially in the concert dance industry where physical appearance holds prime importance.

Existing Solutions and Future Recommendations

Waeli Wang, a first-generation-born Asian American woman discusses the decolonization of dance, and how she practices artmaking and embodied knowledge through social justice frameworks and identity politics. Decolonization can be defined as challenging, resisting, and dismantling the ongoing colonialism and colonial mentalities that permeate all aspects of this society (Fundamentals). She finds herself "engaging with anti-racist pedagogical practices in incorporating Chinese qigong, centering Black artists and African and African American diasporic dance vocabulary, and establishing equitable spaces of collaboration in the dance studio" (Wang). These pedagogical approaches work to counteract erasure and empower marginalized artists. Wang is also an advocate for "increasing exposure to demographically diverse artists since it allows more students to imagine creative ways to incorporate their own experiences into the art of dance" (Wang). By personally experiencing the brilliance of BIPOC artists, there is an immediate moment of recognition for how influential BIPOC art has been on society.

An existing organization that has had a positive impact on the AAPI artistic community including the dance community is the Asian American Arts Alliance. A4 is the only service organization in the country with a mission to ensure greater representation, equity, and opportunities for Asian American artists and cultural organizations. Since being established in 1983, the organization has been championing this pan-ethnic, multidisciplinary community through resource sharing, promotion, and community building. A4 offers programs including "networking events, talks, workshops, and fellowships that lower barriers for engagement, embed pathways of access for artists to connect with cultural gatekeepers, advance opportunities for artists and arts administrators of color, and provide tools to develop Asian American leaders in the community" (A4).

A4 programs are developed as a direct response to community input, with AAPI artists voicing their needs and desires and the service organization researching and investing in relevant resources as a redress. An example of a resource developed by A4 in support of AAPI dance artists is the Jadin Wong Fellowship, which recognizes an emerging Asian American dance artist whose work shows strong potential for greater achievement. This award, a tribute to the life and work of renowned Chinese American actress, dancer, and comedienne Jadin Wong (1913-2010), provides a cash stipend, mentorship, and career development opportunities.

Access to fellowships and programs as provided by like A4 are the keys to creating a platform for AAPI dance artists. Since A4 is an organization with limited funding that supports artists of all disciplines, it is unrealistic for AAPI dancers to be getting enough support from this singular entity. Therefore a recommendation resulting from this research is that A4 explore and develop a partnershipwith another organization focused on fundraising as well as ongoing

research to identify and better support AAPI dancers. By joining forces with an organization that has already worked through the process of branding and building a reputation for themselves, the journey towards raising a significant amount of funds will not be as challenging.

Another recommendation for industry influencers would be generating events that showcase and uplift AAPI dancers and choreographers. In August 2022, an event called *We Belong Here: AAPI Dance Festival* was hosted by Jessica Chen/J Chen Project in partnership with MIDHEAVEN Network. This program presented repertory choreographed by Jessica Chen, as well as 8 emerging AAPI choreographic voices including Jesse Obremski from Gibney Company, Joan Liu from Axons Dance Theatre, and more (Asian Research Institute). Entitling the event *We Belong Here* holds significance since the majority of AAPI dancers and the AAPI community as a whole has felt isolated or have been treated as though they are foreigners in their own native country. In other words, this event provided a space for AAPI choreographers where they were assured that their presence was appreciated. The platform Chen created for AAPI choreographers began a small social media movement, due to the mesmerizing advertisement images that were used of AAPI dancers'. Their bodies were covered in discriminatory words targeting AAPI people, as well as strokes of paint in a variety of colors. These vibrant and compelling images were shared by a plethora of dancers on social media, demonstrating how dance and art can be used for activism and advocacy.

We Belong Here: AAPI Dance Festival also exemplified the prominent place social media holds as a preferred means of communication and engagement among younger generations who are taking their place as arts supporters and activists. According to Dr. Hasan Obaid, social media is used to "accelerate recruitment, mobilisation, communication and dissemination of information as well as to expand spaces of mobilisation which were not present in traditional

mobilisation techniques" (Obaid). The broadcasting of AAPI dancers' talent and achievements, in addition to the creation of a network for community building can be accomplished through the strategic use of social media. A simple but productive method would be to create a social media account, most likely an Instagram and Facebook conjoined account, dedicated to highlighting select AAPI dancers and to announce online or in person events that can be held with minimal funding. A professional or emerging AAPI dancer or choreographer can send a personal biography describing their training and professional experience, a headshot, a dance shot, and up to three videos of their dancing or choreography. Then, the social media account would form a post introducing the AAPI artist, showcasing their work, and connecting them to any artists who were previously introduced in the same account. In addition, the artists will be asked to verbally introduce themselves in order to exhibit their personalities and interests. These videos will be added to the stories, which is a feature on Instagram and Facebook that disappears in 24 hours. In regard to the events, there would be an invitation to all AAPI dancers interested in connecting with fellow AAPI artists, leading to the initiation of conversations that may result in future collaborations and friendships. Overall, the use of social media has the potential to unite an otherwise scattered group of artists, to build a sense of community and support.

Conclusion

Industry malpractices includings tokenism and other harmful diversification tactics, the overlooking of stereotypes that create excessive and unrealistic expectations, and the absence of sincere and sustained efforts to address the social, cultural, and industrial causes are all contributing factors to the nonprofit concert dance industry's failure in generating an equitable and inclusive environment for AAPI dancers. Without the genuine commitment to enforce and

execute anti-racist practices that attest the harmful impacts that tokenism, stereotypes, microaggressions, and the white-dominated concert dance industry system have on the AAPI dance community, a future where this community truly feels like they belong is not likely to be realized. As a Japanese American dancer, I have personally experienced an abundance of micro aggressive attacks and a lifetime of inner questioning regarding my identity within this field, alongside many fellow AAPI dancers. On behalf of our community, I ask non-AAPI dancers, choreographers, administrators, and patrons of concert dance to acknowledge the issue of discrimination against AAPI dancers, and analyze what actions need to be made in order to create a platform for this disadvantaged group. Especially the white artists who are on top of the hierarchy must understand the dire need to recognize and educate themselves and their peers about their responsibilities in debunking the predominantly racist and outdated system in as part of working towards a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment for all dancers of color. For the AAPI artists in this industry, the establishment of a resilient, advocating, and accessible community is requisite in surviving in this competitive field. With a sturdier foundation and support system, more opportunities and possibilities could surface. My utmost desire would be the construction and success of an all AAPI contemporary dance company, with AAPI dancers, choreographers, and administrators working alongside each other to healthily represent AAPI brilliance. If there comes a future where all companies and institutions sustain full parity to professional dancers and students no matter their racial or ethnic background, I believe the overall health of the nonprofit concert dance industry can improve drastically.

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