

Research Report For Unit3

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Project overview

WHAT

My project will focus on the issue of body standards as exemplified by the Chinese dance industry. The specific question is: **"How can the Chinese ballet industry improve unhealthy body standards¹ and promote a healthier², more inclusive body image for dancers?"**

WHY

Ballet has always demanded a high level of body shape and fitness from its dancers, but in recent years the Chinese ballet industry has become even more demanding without scientific and systematic guidance. In order to conform to industry standards, many dancers are forced to use unhealthy behaviours such as dieting, without realising that this can damage their physical, psychological and sustainable development. Therefore, it is imperative that dancers are made aware of the dangers of unscientific body image standards and that the industry is driven to change through interventions with dancers, audiences and industry leaders.

Research Methods

At the time of completion of this Report, the project has only progressed to

¹ **unhealthy body standards:** This refers to the negative physical or mental effects on dancers in the Chinese dance industry in the pursuit of the ultimate body image. Specifically: osteoporosis, menstrual irregularities, depression, etc.

² **A healthy weight** is one that can be maintained without constant dieting, without restricted food intake, and without obsessive exercise routines.(Fine, "Dancers Learn How to Define a Healthy Body Weight")

the research and intervention with the dancers, and therefore the following content is specific to the dancer's research intervention session.

1. Subjects of the study: for active or retired dancers who are recognised as professional dancers and are at least 18 years old.

2. Research Methods:

A mixed-method research approach was used, combining quantitative and qualitative research, and using the information cross-comparison method to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of unscientific body size standards on dancers' physical and mental health in the Chinese ballet community.

- (1) Quantitative research: a questionnaire survey was conducted to collect quantitative data from 120 dancers on body standards, training, diet, and physical and mental health. And through gender cross-comparison, we further understand what differential effects unscientific body image requirements have on male and female dancers.
- (2) Qualitative research: interviews, for the remarkable data presented in the questionnaire, six professional ballet dancers were invited to conduct in-depth interviews to dig out their real thoughts, feelings and experiences.

3. Research tools and reasons:

- (1) Research tools: questionnaires, interviews, literature analysis.
- (2) Reasons for choosing research tools:
 - a. Questionnaire survey: able to collect specific data on the target group quickly and in large quantities, helping to judge the direction of the research and preliminary conclusions.
 - b. Interview: It can understand the thoughts and feelings of the dancers more deeply, make up for the limitations of the

questionnaire survey, and provide more detailed analyses.

- c. Literature analysis: Helps to understand the history of the development of China's dance industry and the background of the formation of unscientific body image standards.

Research results

A total of 120 data were collected in this survey of dancers, and analysing the data through gender cross-referencing reveals some interesting phenomena:

1. Demographic characteristics:
 - (1) Sample size: the sample size of female dancers (97) is more than four times the sample size of male dancers (22), suggesting that the ballet community is predominantly female.
 - (2) Height and weight: The height and weight of female dancers were mainly concentrated in 160-169cm (78.35%) and 41-50kg (71.14%), while male dancers were relatively dispersed, mainly concentrated in 170-179cm (54.55%) and 61-65kg (40.91%). This suggests that the industry may be relatively lax in its standards for male dancers, or that male dancers have different levels of pursuit of body image standards.
2. Female dancers have heavier physical and mental stress than male dancers:
 - (1) Menstrual problems: 50.52 % of female dancers experienced menstrual problems during their dance career, suggesting that female dancers are more susceptible to physiological problems affected by body standards.
 - (2) Psychological problems: 55.67 per cent of female dancers experienced mental health problems (low mood, depression,

anxiety, low self-esteem, etc.) during their dance career, compared with 22.73% of male dancers.

- (3) Weight problems: 30% of male dancers have never been asked to lose weight, and only 1.3% of female dancers have never been asked to lose weight by a dance school or company.
- (4) Dieting behaviours: A higher percentage of female dancers (67.01%) adopted unhealthy dieting behaviours during their dance careers, compared to 31.82% of male dancers.
- (5) Attitudes towards body image standards: although both male and female dancers perceived current industry body image standards to be unscientific (65.98 % of females compared to 59.09 % of males), female dancers were likely to be more cognisant of this unscientific nature.

3. Sources of pressure on body image standards:

Both male and female dancers identified self-demand as the main source of body pressure. However, female dancers were more likely to rank 'school and company selection systems and teacher demands' as the second main source (25.33%) while male dancers ranked 'competition with colleagues' as the second main source (28.57%). This indicates that female dancers are more likely to be restricted and influenced by industry standards and selection systems.

4. Professional guidance from schools and dance companies:

- (1) 69.17 % of the dancers indicated that when they were asked to lose weight, the companies/dance schools only asked for weight loss without specifying a weight range. This can lead to dancers pushing their physical limits to lose weight without any limits in order to fulfil the requirement, and is one of the manifestations of the current

unscientific body image standards.

- (2) 46.67 % of dance companies/dance schools do not have psychological counsellors, dietitians and rehabilitators; about 30% of the institutions only have psychologists and rehabilitators respectively, and only 6.67% of the institutions have dietitians. This means that the vast majority of dancers at this stage are losing weight blindly without professional scientific guidance.

Gaps identified

1. Dancers' psychological pressure is greater than physical pressure

For dancers body standards and physical requirements have long been commonplace, but the pressure brought about by dieting, high external demands and intense training is invariably increasing. Stereotypes and ballet aesthetic are the leading cause of body dissatisfaction. (Barlaan) Nearly 50 % of dancers are chronically depressed, anxious, and dissatisfied with themselves due to body image standards, and this figure is as high as 55 % for female dancers. for female dancers is as high as 55 per cent.

2. The biggest source of body image anxiety for dancers turns out to be the dancers themselves

It was predicted that the biggest source of body image stress for dancers would be the school or company selection system. However, in the actual study, although many dancers ranked 'school or company selection system' as the number one source of body anxiety, 'dancer's self-demand' scored the highest overall. This also reflects that in more than ten years of dance training system, even if no one else's encouragement, dancers will have a strong sense of self-restraint and management, which is undoubtedly one of the sources of dancer's stress.

3. Unscientific body requirements affect female dancers more than male dancers

Interventions for dancers

1. Intervention Targets:

6 current or retired dancers with a concentrated age range of 20-35 years old who were identified as professional dancers were selected for the intervention with the dancers. The backgrounds were from the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow, the Russian Dance Academy, the Beijing Dance Academy, the Chongqing Ballet Company, the Guangzhou Arts Academy, and the Department of Dance at Dankook University in South Korea. The dancers who received the intervention were from different age groups and had successively studied in different educational systems and different dance genres both at home and abroad, which helped to better study the differences in dance body standards among different age groups, dance genres, and both at China and abroad.

2. Intervention:

Through the mode of one-to-one interviews using informational interventions, the questionnaire data was fed back to the ballet dancers to help them understand the prevailing problems and related impacts of dance in the country. At the same time, the interview process was recorded in the form of a documentary film, which served as the material for subsequent interventions.

(1) The role of intervention:

- a. Raise awareness: Presenting data to dancers can help them realise the prevalent problem of unscientific body standards in the industry and the risks that may be associated with such pursuits.

- b. Enhance empathy: Helping dancers to realise that they are not alone, and that many others are facing similar pressures and challenges, thus providing psychological support and encouragement.
- c. Promote action: help dancers think more rationally and make more positive changes, for example:
 - Seek professional help, e.g. guidance from a nutritionist and counselling.
 - Participating in industry reforms, e.g. dancers who are teachers will treat their students with more scientific body image requirements and value their physical and mental health.

(2) Conclusions of the intervention:

The Chinese dance industry has become increasingly demanding in its pursuit of body image, not only influenced by ballet stereotypes, but also ignoring genetics and scientific guidance and blindly pursuing the Russian Ballet School's standards of body image. This unhealthy pursuit even takes priority over the dance itself, resulting in dancers sacrificing muscle strength and technical skills in the pursuit of extreme slenderness, which ultimately affects the level of dance. Although some dancers have recognised the problem and attempted to instruct their students in a healthier way, students are still required to diet and lose weight to meet entry standards. The dancers believe that the core of change lies in the leadership of the dance industry, which needs to push for more scientifically sound standards and guidance.

Summary

Strengths:

In this phase of the study, I have collected a large amount of very meaningful

and valuable data for a more in-depth study of the Chinese dance industry. Through the initial intervention, more dancers became aware of the physical and mental damage caused by unscientific body standards, which further caused more and more people to reflect and change their actions, and also laid a good foundation for subsequent interventions.

Weaknesses:

I should use the data collected to make more comprehensive and in-depth interventions, such as collaborating with more professional organisations to carry out a wider range of interventions to promote a healthier dance industry. Promote the development of more scientific and reasonable training and dietary standards for ballet dancers, as well as the establishment of a mental health support system to help dancers develop a more positive and confident self-perception.

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