

The Gray Dance - An Analysis of Ageism in Dance

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Abstract : This paper briefly examines age and its impact on a dancer's performance career. An investigation into the possible reasons why audiences don't regularly see veteran dancers on stage (termed as the Gray Dancer) supports the research. This analysis reflects some of the social dynamics that shape perceptions of the aging body in the U.S., as well as the correlation between the meaning of old and decay in Western culture. The primary question addressed in this research asks, who has the prerogative to determine when a dancer should stop dancing - society or the dancer themselves. The aging process can significantly shorten a performer's professional career. The body has less endurance and is more susceptible to injuries, fatigue, etc. It also becomes less flexible and loses muscular strength and tone. A reduction in physical skills may usher gray dancers to embrace an ideology of shorter careers. However, in today's age of diversity, equity, and inclusion, the realm of dance performance should reflect the times in which it is rooted; a multi-generational environment where people interact and participate in all of life's events. Overall, this study champions the inclusion of gray dancers as representations of mastery and wisdom akin to those traits associated with age and experience across various professions. Dance is an art form that transcends the assumptions of youthful beauty and physical ability. It serves as a conduit for conveying a lifetime of experiences, emotions, and ideas through the expressive vehicle of the body. Furthermore, it presents audiences with a medium to perceive and comprehend both themselves and life itself, echoing Noverre's insightful contemplation. The essay underscores the importance of valuing, sensing, and appreciating the richness that gray dancers bring to the stage by delving into segments of dance history and analyzing the possible influence of curators, directors, audiences, and society in general on ageism in dance.

Keywords : dance, ageism, politics in dance, curatorial process

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