"Normalization" of Gender Expression in Greek Traditional Dance.
Perceptions of Adult Dancers.

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Introduction

Given the patriarchal character of the Greek society, the woman's position in dance is considered as an extension of her sexuality, and issues of beauty and dance, dexterity, responsibility and seduction are raised during her dance. Gender is examined as a social relationship and cultural good as well as a social result of their gender action (Papataxiarchis, 1998). Sociology (Bourdieu) and anthropology (Strathern and Cowan) have primarily studied human body as such as well as in traditional but from gender point of view (Cowan, 1998). During the 1980s, the shift of anthropological discourse to "politics of identities" resulted in the predominant involvement of women anthropologists (such as Strathern and Cowan) with issues of gender identity, and thus they turned to the study of dance (Tyrovola, 2012).

On the one hand, in Sociology it has been Bourdieu who has contributed to our understanding of the interrelationship among body, habits or everyday practices and social space. In Bourdieu's view, each body is subjective but not individual - the visible product of the composition and volumes of class-specific capitals accrued over the course of a lifetime - and that the world is an unbroken cycle of mutually reflected transfers (Markoulatos, 2007). Social space is the field of expression of habits, habitus, according to the Latin term that Bourdieu coined and introduced, trying to explain how habits of different groups create cultural characteristics and social

groups, and how social position (social status) is integrated into everyday life and practices. In Bourdieu's theory, taste "and" choice is not an inimitable peculiarity of a free individuality, but the exemplary form of submission to social fate, the result of a special social heritage.

On the other hand, in Anthropology, two women anthropologists - Strathern and Cowan – have shed light on how gender identity is formed and illustrated when dance is studied. According to Strathern (1985), who studied gender relations of the natives of Papua New Guinea while dancing, the male dance morl indicates the static male maturity and solidarity, whereas the female dance werl shows women's graceful balance. Thus, dance highlights the opposition between men and women's dance, where male dance expresses maturity and seriousness, whereas women's dance expresses grace. In Cowan's view (1998), dance, in general, within the context of a non-verbal form of sociability is a means of expression and communication and one of the most important social events of the human being, which is also directly related to history, culture and evolution of a society. Traditional dance, in particular, in addition to entertainment and artistic creation, has also been a means of education, as it has functioned as a way of initiating the system of collective representations, cultural values and social symbols, and it has strengthened the unity of the group and has been, together with other historical and cultural elements, a point of reference of collective identity (Hubert, 1974; Loutzaki, 2001).

Taking into consideration the aforementioned sociological and anthropological theoretical discussions and field observations, we will try to show how gender issues come forward in the Greek traditional dance. As far as the position of the female gender in the Greek traditional dance is concerned, it has been degraded in relation to that of the male. Whereas the woman is not able to improvise but only to give more weight to her dance expression (Dimas, 2004), the man enjoys greater freedom of movement. A female dancer can be criticized for not maintaining self-control during the dance, so both the woman and the man, while dancing, are called, on the one hand, the former to act in ways that make her confirm her gender, her femininity and, on the other hand, the latter can activate male social characteristics (Butler, 2008).

Purpose of the research - Research questions

During the formation of our gender identity, there are agencies of socialization that contribute to preserving and reproducing gender discrimination, a process that happens involuntarily and may not be perceived many times. The purpose of the present paper is to examine gender stereotypes that prevail based on the position and role of men and women in dance.

Research questions:

- o How are gender behaviors performed during the traditional dance lesson?
- o How are gender behaviors attributed during a traditional event?
- o How are the position of the man and the woman attributed in the "circle" of dance?
- o Why do dancers participate in a dance club?

Research Methodology - Sample

The research sample consisted of 100 adult dancers of traditional dances from the area of Athens (50 men & 50 women). The tool used to collect the research data is the questionnaire with the addition of vignettes, i.e. some brief descriptions of hypothetical people or situations. The questionnaires were distributed evenly to 50 male and 50 female traditional dancers, so that the results would not show large differences for which gender might be responsible. The vignette is a focused description of a series of events that are considered representative and typical, or representational of an action. It has a narrative structure, which maintains the chronological flow of events, and is usually limited to a small development, in one or a few factors, in a limited space or in all three above. Thus, the vignette, as a new research tool, is a concise, descriptive case study, which detects a relationship or illuminates a new dimension of concepts, through examples of innovative practices.

The vignettes were intended to mobilize the respondents' thought so to be able to recall previous experiences, relate them to those of the vignette, and give a representative answer to their "beliefs" and convictions (Alexander & Becker, 1978). Prior to the final distribution of the questionnaires, a pilot survey was conducted, which aimed to: (a) time the completion of the questionnaire; and (b) identify possible ambiguities and difficulties in completing the questionnaire. As it has been argued, the pilot distribution and the tentative implementation of the questionnaire are means to evaluate it (Athanassiou, 2000). The questionnaire was distributed initially to 10

men and 10 women of a dance club in Attica. The pilot distribution of the questionnaires did not result in significant difficulties, questions or objections, and the time required to complete the questionnaire was considered short (10-15 minutes).

The distribution and completion of the questionnaires took place during the month of February of 2020. Their completion and collection took place immediately after their distribution. The processing and analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire were done both quantitatively and qualitatively, because in the questionnaire there were both closed and open-ended questions. This form of the questionnaire significantly facilitated the coding of the answers after the completed questionnaires had been collected. The analysis of statistical data concerns both the description of the results and their interrelationship (inductive analysis). The analysis was performed with the statistical processing software SPSS v.22.0. Content analysis was performed and the responses were categorized in order to enhance the quantitative results that had come out.

Results

Many social factors contribute to forming social subjects' gender identity and discrimination that results from it, in a formal or informal way (Bonoti, 1999). The results of the research concern practices that are followed during the lessons, events, and the reasons why the subject has chosen this preoccupation. The first vignette was about a stereotypical behavior that prevails socially that of women's disobedience and their social discussion (i.e. gossip).

> During the dance lesson a havoc is heard from the discussion of some male and female dancers. A group of dancers is creating this hustle and bustle. From which group do you think the fuss is coming?

The largest percentage of the sample (72.4%) claimed that this havoc comes from a mixed group consisting of women and men, 24.10% from a female group and 3.4% from a male group. They were then asked to justify their answer and the type of discussion these group people might have had. The percentage (24.1%) who answered "women" justified their answer by saying that "this is usually the case", "this is how women are" and "this is what my experience says". Respectively, of the largest

percentage of the sample that answered that it comes from mixed groups (72.4%), 40% of this sample stated that "they (men) are seduced by women", "men and women are having a fight". Regarding the content of the discussions, the largest percentage of the sample answered (80%) that men would "make comments on politics" or "would fight for (football) teams" and, respectively, 76% answered that women would "gossip" or talk about "the clothes they had bought".

The next vignette was about how the "first dancer" is chosen for a dance competition.

> You are taking part in a dance competition as a mixed group. At the last minute, you are informed that you will dance in a single and not in a double circle. Which person do you think will be the first dancer and why?

80.9% of the sample answered that a man should enter first in the circle, and 19.1% a woman. The vast majority of the sample that chose the man justified their choice because "this is how it has happened since the past, the man is first" and "men drag the dance". Respectively, the percentage that chose the woman, they consider that a woman can be the first dancer "for artistic reasons".

The following vignette concerns the practice of "treating" the (people who play the musical) instruments at a feast.

> You are dancing as the first dancer in a dance you want, and a man and a woman from your kins are preparing to "treat" the (people who play the musical) instruments. Whom would you prefer doing that, the man or woman, and why?

70.8% answered that they would like to be "a man" because "this is how it is done", "I have noticed that this is how it is done", "the man has had this right for a long time", respectively 29.2% answered "a woman" because "the custom is for the man to treat, and so it has been used by the people in ancient times up to the present. Nowadays, of course, women also treat, and it really is something that does not bother me as long as it is done in a beautiful way and discretion," "if there is one of my kins, let it be a woman".

Finally, the respondents were asked "what is the main reason you participate in a dance club". The largest percentage of men in the sample answered that they participate in order to "maintain customs and values", "do physical exercise", whereas women answered that they participate in order to "socialize" and for their "well-being".

Discussion – Conclusions

Despite the limitation of the research that lies in the non-representativeness of the sample, a sample of group of people who comes from the local socio-cultural environment of the Attica region, the results of the present research are multileveled and can be discussed from different points of view.

At one level, the research highlights that gender is an important factor of differentiation in terms of the kind of dance that the individual will be involved with. It is exactly the individual's involvement in what kind of dance that reveals how the individual is influenced by social stereotypes about "male" and "female" dances/practices and, thus, forming and reproducing the individual's gender identity.

At a second level, the research shows how agencies of socialization (i.e. dance clubs) contribute to forming the individual's gender identity through informal and formal processes (Thanos & Bouna, 2015), and how these dance clubs play the role of mediator, since individuals come closer to each other, share experiences, experience emotions, are united for a common purpose, and, most importantly, they are liberated and communicate in these clubs when they dance (Berger, Owen & Man, 1993).

At a third level, the performance of a dance as such involves bodies, which are within a specific cultural context, and, thus, both the dance event and the dancers' bodies are interwoven and interconnected with what is going on within the wider society. And it is in the performance of a dance in a dance event that the representation of men (physical vigor/strength as a symbol of masculinity) and women (confirmation of their femininity) and, eventually, their gender identity are fully fledged and manifested, as shown in the respondents' response to the vignettes.

At a fourth level and from the content analysis of the justifications of the respondents' answers, the research shows that the individuals – especially women - that choose

(Greek traditional) dance as preoccupation do it because they see dance event as an opportunity to "get out" of the house and hang out with friends and stop feeling isolated (due to their housework and care for home and family). Thus, the relative restriction of women's daily life make their impatience for dancing events intensify.

The results of the present research as discussed at the fourth level of analysis is further assisted by three different studies carried out by Greek researchers.

(1)   A research made by Karkalos in 2007 illustrated the uniqueness of Greek traditional dance as to how much it affects positively women's psychosynthesis.

(2)   Another research made by Mavrovouniotis and Argyriadou a year later, in 2008, also showed how much dance contributes to a woman's life, and emphasized the positive effect that the dance has on her psychosynthesis.

(3)   Finally, a research by Gratsioni, Koutsoumba and Tyrovola in 2012 showed the important role of dance in the quality of life of adults in general.

Even though the present study is limited in scope and in geographical area, it "unlocks a door" and shows how men and women in a specific area of Greece practise and/or experience Greek traditional dances and what social representations (and prejudices) of the "male" and "female" dancer carry. The hope is this study to become a springboard for similar studies not only around Greece but around globe, so that there can be comparative studies on how gender identity is formed and manifested in (traditional) dance events, without forgetting that gender identities is a fluid concept and depends each time on the subjects themselves (Butler, 2008).

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