Same-Sex Ballroom Dance

A Challenge to Patriarchal Gender Order

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Abstract

In my MA thesis I analyze how women's same-sex competitive ballroom dance challenges patriarchal order. Same-sex relations between women challenge the patriarchal order. Ballroom dance is a performance of heterosexuality and conventional gender roles. It is a symbolic representation of male-female sexual and social relationships. I argue that women's same-sex ballroom dance challenges these patriarchal relations by disconnecting gender from dance roles and creating more balanced roles. The analysis is based on semi-structured interviews with nine dancers and two dance teachers and participant observation. First I discuss what motivating factors there are for women to pursue same-sex ballroom dance. Then I analyze the argument of challenging patriarchal order. Although same-sex dance imported the imbalance of power between leader and follower from two-sex dance with the technique, it has a potential to challenge this order by disconnecting sex and gender from the dance roles. Dancers are free to choose a role and it is not prescribed based on sex. They can switch these roles, too. Intimate metacommunication do not relate to the leading following division in same-sex dance. Same-sex ballroom dance can also diminish some of the asymmetries of ballroom dance. Further, women are not expected to perform femininity in their appearance in competitions. There is an absence of sexist narrative and an absence of age and body shape expectations.

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Introduction

In this thesis I will analyze how women's same-sex competitive ballroom dance challenges patriarchal order. Competitive same-sex ballroom dance differs from the conventional two-sex form in that the two partners are of the same sex. But this is not the only difference. It results in a lot of aspects that can distinguish two-sex and same-sex dance. In my study I will focus on how same-sex dancer women experience dance partnerships and perform dance during training and the competitions. I argue that same-sex dancing is not simply an imitation of male-female dancing by two women, but it challenges the notion of patriarchal male-female relations reflected symbolically in dance. Moreover I will argue that, it cannot totally eliminate power differences between the partners and reach total equality. The academic significance of this research lies in the phenomenon that ballroom dance is a symbolic representation of gender relations. Building on this, the fact that same-sex partnerships challenge the notion of gender relations leads to the proposition that same-sex dancing challenges the notion of gender relations. Ballroom dance is a performance of heterosexuality and conventional gender roles. It is a symbolic representation of male-female sexual and social relationships. Same-sex dance challenges these patriarchal relations by disconnecting gender from dance roles and creating more balanced roles.

In the first part of the analysis I am going to discuss what motivating factors there are in pursuing same-sex dance. I will reflect on the impact of sexual orientation as well. Same-sex dance does not necessarily relate to sexual orientation. Many heterosexual identified women pursue it, too. Besides lesbian couples there are couples of lesbian and non-gay women, and there are couples of two non-gay women, too. It is much less common amongst heterosexual men to choose same-sex dance. It can be attributed to the more rigid gender role expectations,

the grater markedness and fear of male homosexuality, the grater limitations of physical contact between men. One of the possible motivators for same-sex dance is sexual orientation: attraction towards women and for some disattraction towards men. There are some who dance with their intimate partner. Identifying as gay can relate to participation in same-sex dance through taking a political stance, too. Same-sex dance can be perceived as a safe space in at least two meanings: it is safe from the male gaze and safe from heteronormativity. It is also free from patriarchal elements, which is perceived as one major advantage by many, be them feminist identified or not. Another group of motivators relate to the hobby nature of the sport, its less formalization and the atmosphere of the classes and competitions.

In the second part of the analysis I am going to focus on how dance roles are performed and negotiated. Dancing together requires a great deal of coordination between two bodies. There must always be one partner at a time who decides what to do. The leader gives impulses to the follower, who reacts to these and performs the given figure. So one person has the control over the pair's performance, otherwise it would be two individuals dancing by themselves. Originally leading was connected to men and following to women. Although same-sex dance imported this imbalance of power from two-sex dance because it is inherent in the technique, it has a potential to challenge this order by disconnecting sex and gender from the dance roles. Dancers are not bound to take a role of dominance-submission/ active-passive based on their biological sex, but can choose a role that fits their personality or desires more, or, at least, they have a possibility to negotiate this with their partner. Gender is usually not associated with the dance roles, either. Dancers do not connect the roles to femininity and masculinity, so they do not reproduce gender relations in dance. Dance roles can also be switched: with different partners, within the same partnership for different dances or for different periods, or within the same choreographies. Further, intimate metacommunication do not relate to the leading following division in same-sex dance.

In the third part of the analysis I will focus on how same-sex dance can diminish some of the imbalances of ballroom dance. Same-sex ballroom dance is more symmetric than the two-sex version. This is reflected in the practice of creating choreographies that emphasize the equality of the partners. There is a conscious effort to avoid complementary figures that reflect traditional male-female relations, and choose more balanced ones instead. The equality is further reflected in the partners dressing in the same or very similar outfits in competitions.

In the next part I will analyze what other features are capable of challenging patriarchal order. Women are not expected to perform high femininity in their appearance in competitions. They can also choose androgynous or masculine outfit if they wish. There is an absence of sexist narrative and that of age and body shape expectations. Same-sex competitions further lack some of the practices of conventional competitions, which are patriarchal, like grading the couple on the points of the man. In same-sex dance competitions the couples are graded to categories based on their achievement at the site.

I owe acknowledgments to many people. First I would like to thank my interviewees that they devoted their time to share their views and experience of dance. I am also grateful to my supervisor that she accompanied me at every phase of the research. I thank all my other teachers and fellow students who shared their thoughts with me and expressed interest in the research. I would also like to thank my dance teacher and fellow dancers that they helped to make dance a significant part of my life. Last, but not least I would like to thank my dance partner that she believed in my progress when my dance background was far behind of hers and this made it possible that I persisted in and entered my first competition.

Equality

Research shows that same-sex couples do not mimic heterosexual relations. Part of this research deals with equality in same-sex relations. They found that there is a greater flexibility of roles. Shared decision making contributes to the satisfaction with the relationship. There is no tendency to feminine-masculine role division in same-sex couples regarding tasks and traits. (Risman, Schwartz, 1988) In most cases partners share household chores equally. (Patterson, 2000)

Although the majority of same-sex couples aim for equal division of power, they cannot always reach that. Still they show a more balanced pattern than heterosexual couples. There are features that can lead to inequality in relationships. It is more probable that those with more financial resources or better qualification have more power. Even when these conditions exist, it is less probable that they lead to power differences in lesbian relationships than in heterosexual ones. Another predictor of more power is the less emotional involvement in the relationship. (Patterson, 2000)

In heterosexual relationships the division of labor is gendered. This division contributes to the construction of gender. West and Fenstermaker (1993) argue that doing household chores are related to the accomplishment of gender. They introduce the phrase “doing gender”, by which they mean that gender is “accomplished through interaction with others” (p. 155.) West and Fenstermaker discuss how the accomplishment of gender relates to inequality in heterosexual relations. They draw examples of conversational shifts, the asymmetrical division of household labor and parenting, and the emotional labor expectations in women’s paid labor. The unequal division of household labor affects women’s participation in paid labor, their wages and the satisfaction with the relationships (Shelton, John, 1996).

Members of a same-sex relationship regard equality as an important precondition of relationship. Weston (1991) discusses what is perceived to make a same-sex relationship egalitarian. The fact that there is no prescribed division of labor was cited by many respondents. An equal division can be reached in different ways. It does not have to be totally symmetric. Partners can rotate the tasks or can decide who does what tasks. Gender roles are not connected to tasks. For couples, where there was a butch-femme setting, the chores still were not allocated based on gender roles. And in the rare cases where one partner was financially supported by the other, they did not identify as butch and femme. Some gay persons view equality as something unachievable in heterosexual relations. They regard gendered difference as a source of inequality. This is why many reject the butch-femme setting, too. They regard it as an import of roles of heterosexual relations.

Dunne (1997) made an analysis on lesbian couples' practice on egalitarianism. She shows that gender itself cannot be responsible for women's dependence. It is heterosexuality that produces the inequalities. Those that can compare lesbian relationships with previous heterosexual ones predominantly state that their lesbian relationships are more equal. They view egalitarianism a central criterion for the longevity and satisfaction of their relationship. They mention two features of heterosexual relations that contribute to the inequality: men's access to more economic sources and heterosexual role play. These women regard the absence of roles based on gender expectations as a major advantage of lesbian relationships. The division of tasks has to be negotiated instead of following prescribed roles. These women are sensitive to issues of domination and power, they believe that power comes from inequality, and this makes relationships vulnerable. Their being marginalized makes them more aware and critical of power structures in heterosexual relations. They hold an egalitarian attitude towards their relationships, which includes the rejection of the domination of one partner. The couples find economic independence crucial. They try to avoid the "Rozzie and

Harriett" (Sullivan, 1996) model of one breadwinner relation. It is very rare and even if it happens the partners regard it as a temporary solution. Partners try to avoid economic inequality, and apply strategies to smooth its effects if it is the case. They want to avoid that this would lead to unequal division of household labor and decisions, or make a partner get stuck in the relationship, or the feeling of owing something to the other. The couples usually keep separate bank accounts and share the household costs equally. Although in the case of income differences this equal sharing can put the lower earning partner in a disadvantaged position because she contributes a larger proportion of her income. Some couples negotiate it with proportional contribution to the shared costs. Others decide to live on the standard that the lower salary would allow. In case of economic inequalities, unlike in heterosexual relations, the partner with the higher income regards her "power" as something negative. Another source of inequality can be unilateral home ownership, when one partner owns the home of the couple. (Dunne, 1997)

There is a more equal division of emotional labor in lesbian relationships than in heterosexual ones, too. In heterosexual couples, women express emotions more and would need that their partner does the same, while men find it difficult and threatening to express emotions. In lesbian relationships both partners contribute to the level of intimacy equally (Dunne, 1997).

There are different strategies to allocate household tasks between the partners of a lesbian couple. Since there is no gender difference in lesbian relations, the division cannot be based on prescribed gender roles and do not relate to doing gender, either. The rarest solution is that the partners imitate traditional gender division. They consciously strive for equality in most cases. There is a symmetric shared approach, the symmetric specialized approach and the asymmetric approach for division of tasks. In the symmetric shared approach the partners do the tasks together or in turns. In the symmetric specialized approach the tasks are divided

on the basis of personal preferences and skills. It is different from the asymmetric approach in that in the end partners take an equal share. The specialization is rarely on the lines of traditional gender division. And if one partner has skills for traditional male tasks, it does not need to result in the replication of gender roles. In these cases the partners do not perceive or label these tasks masculine, so these tasks are not connected to gender roles. In the asymmetric approach there is inequality in the amount of tasks completed. It can be only a matter of quantity, or less typically it can resemble gendered divisions. This inequality can be a result of one partner being unemployed or the different cleanness needs of the partners, or least frequently a result of butch-femme role play. (Dunne, 1997)

Parenting can be shared equally, too. Sullivan (2004) researched lesbian coparent families' division of labor and parenting. She argues that biological tie to the child does not necessarily result in gendered division of parenting. Birth mothers and non-birth mothers allocated tasks related to childcare very evenly in most of the cases. This demonstrates that ungendered, equal parenting is possible. She calls this phenomenon undoing gender.

There is some possibility for unequal division of roles in coparent lesbian families, though. Sullivan (1996, 2004) describes this phenomenon through what she calls "Rozzie and Harriet" couples. These couples are built on a one breadwinner model: one of the partners has a full time job, while the other is the full-time caregiver of the child, is responsible for the household and provides emotional support to her partner. The staying home partners report dissatisfaction of this situation. Some perceive being devalued by their partners. This setting results in income differences, which can lead to power inequalities. Further it affects the division of household labor and creates gaps in leisure time.

Dance as a performance of cultural identity

Dance studies are part of cultural studies. Cultural studies are predominantly text based and even if body is involved it is mostly on the representation and discursive policies of it. We can regard and study movements as texts, too. Dance research is marginalized in the academic field. This can be due to its association with the body, femininity and non-whiteness, all of which are regarded as of secondary position. (Desmond, 1993-94)

Dance research discusses how social identity is represented in movement. Desmond (1993-94) argues that dance is a performance of cultural identity. We can read movement as a sign of group belonging, e.g. for gender, age, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, nationality, health and for certain characteristics, like being "sexy". Dances are related to non-dance movement prescriptions and other types of dances. There are acceptable and rejected ways of dancing for members of a certain group, e.g. based on gender or ethnicity. It is important to ask who dances, where, with whom, how, when. Equally important is to ask who does not dance where, with whom, how, when and under which circumstances. There are different attitudes towards certain groups' use of body, and about relationships between them. Pleasure can be performed in different ways. Some bodies can be more displayed than others in poses. Further, the two genders are prescribed different characteristics.

The migration of dance styles is informative of social changes. Dances of lower social strata move upward, but during this transmission typical changes occur. There is a trend towards codification. The dances get often desexualized, too. This desexualization can be noticed e.g. in the lessened moving of the pelvis. (Desmond, 1993-94)

There are census questions regarding dances. Some dances limit the number of participants, for example they require an even number of dancers so that they can be paired. These are usually related to gender. Many dances are exclusive: they are done only by one

gender or by mixed-sex couples. Queer theory points out that there is a heterosexual bias in dance studies. Dance studies can be seen to regard dance as supporting alternative social ideas. For other groups it is the other way around: dance's role is seen to reinforce the status quo of society, like the traditional values relating to gender. (Cohen-Stratyner, 2001)

Ballroom dance reflects the image of heterosexual relation and marriage (Malnig, 1992; McMains, 2001). It is a performance of intimate communication between man and woman, sensuality, closeness, love, flirting, seduction, debate and reconciliation (Malnig, 1992). Standard dances evoke associations of cleanness, elegance, wealth, light, power, romance, and gracefulness. The movements are vertical, flowing, and light and effort is hidden. Women are portrayed as beautiful while men as chivalrous. Latin dances are more sexual, which is reflected in the costumes, in the movement style and in the visual narrative. The narrative of the movements and the discourse around it is about (hetero)sexual seduction or courtship. The sexualization is also reflected in the hip movements, which are pronounced in Latin dances. There is more expressivity of emotions. (McMains, 2001) Desmond describes Latin dances as "a socially sanctioned way of expressing or experiencing sexuality" (1993-94, p. 48.) and "sensuous, romantic, expressive, emotional, *heteroerotic* and passionate "(p. 50, emphasis mine).

There are differences in the ways men and women perform dance and what is expected of them. Male superiority over women is usually represented in partner dancing. Daniel (1991) highlights this through the case of rumba. He sees a contradiction in rumba regarding equality: it expresses respect for both sexes through courting, and inequality between the sexes indicated in the limited participation of women. Male dominance is visible in the performance of dance. It is men who invite women to dance and initiate the exit. They are the ones who decide on the direction of the movement and make their female partner change her movements. In one word, they are the ones, who *lead*. Women's role is to react to the

initiatives of the man. They can strategize their movement, but it is defensive then. Sometimes it happens that a more mature woman challenge her male partner by not responding in the expected way. The men usually react indignantly to this and stop dancing. If there is no other man who takes the woman over, the musicians stop. Daniel regards this as a proof that the attention is on the male. He contrasts this with the belief that the gaze is on the women. I do not feel a contradiction here. The male gaze can be a sign of objectifying women's bodies, while the attention made on the men shows the male-centeredness of the initiative.

Crossing gender borders in partner dancing

Same-sex ballroom dance involves transgressing gender borders. Gender boundaries can be crossed in other forms of dancing, too. There is a so called gender-free dancing movement that includes contra dancing, square dancing, country dancing, and folk dancing. (Ricciotti, 2006) Besides that these do not include ballroom dance, there are many similarities. Dance roles are not connected to sex, people can dance any role they wish. Both are originated in gay movement but have expanded it by now. Both use gender-free calling for the dance roles. There is a difference however: according to Ricciotti (2006) gender-free dancing is less for couple dance, rather a group form of partner dancing, while the contemporary forms of same-sex ballroom dance are based on couples.

Powell (2002) made a research on Old Time Dance (OTD), which is not considered gender-free, but in her sample many dancers play with the notion of gender. OTD includes different types of traditional country dances. The dances usually include partner changing after each turn. The dances are playful and can be characterized by coquetry. Contrary to gender-free versions of traditional dances, OTD employs calls attached to gender.

In the following I will highlight the similarities and differences between same-sex ballroom dance and the gender crossing practices of OTD. Powell analyzes how members of the Old Time Dance Community play with gender through switching dance parts, cross-dressing and flirting. OTD is a group partner dancing form. It is similar to ballroom dancing in that it contains pairs of a man and a woman, where the man dances the leading part and the woman the following part. So the dance parts are gendered and heterosexist in both forms. OTD is different from ballroom dance in that the pairs form a group, where one caller directs the moves of all couples, while in ballroom dance the couples dance individually. In OTD the partners have to be in a fixed position respective to the other so, Powell argues, it is more the position of a person rather than the sex that matters for which gender role is attributed to a person. On the other hand OTD reproduces gender not only through dance parts but through the language the caller uses for these parts (i.e. ladies, gentlemen).

Powell argues that OTD expands gender boundaries by several ways. This includes taking up the role that is prescribed to the other sex by switching dance parts, by cross dressing, by flirting with members of the same sex and rejecting derogatory images of gender.

Powell finds that it is mostly women who switch dance parts. Men find it more threatening to their masculinity, especially since they feel that dancing itself is not regarded as masculine, either. The switch is usually due to the sex imbalance within the group. However, some do it in order to have fun, to learn the other part or because they want to dance with a specific person who is of the same sex. This practice is not welcomed by everyone in the groups. Some conflate dance parts with gender and with sexuality. They associate men taking the following role as feminine and homosexual. Newer development is that some dances are structured in a way that dancers of the same sex get paired for periods.

Cross dressing in OTD is not frequent and can be applied only to men (male-to-female). According to Powell, women's cross dressing (female-to-male) is not definable. Those men

who cross dress for their follower role, always do it in a way that they emphasize masculinity in their appearance and they wear a skirt besides. E. g. a man wears sport socks with trainers, men's T-shirt and a skirt. It is meant to be funny, which indicates distancing from cross dressing and feminine appearance.

Flirting is very typical in OTD. Some people also do it with members of the same sex. It is more frequent amongst women. They regard it only as play, and this is their justification to be able to do that with people of the same sex, too. Women regard it useful for creating a less competitive environment between them.

Powell's last argument is that rejecting derogatory images of gender helps expanding gender boundaries. By rejecting derogatory images of gender she describes the celebration of femininity. She claims that in OTD dancers exaggerate some aspects of gender. Women like to express their femininity. Taking part in OTD strengthens their sense of femininity. Many claim that they like dancing because the dance roles are gendered. The author here seems to conflate the aspects of gender border crossing with the effects of experiencing the gendered nature of one's original dance role.

Besides the similarities, there are differences between the phenomenon described by Powell and same-sex ballroom dancing. The commonalities are switching dance roles, and flirting with members of the same sex. I would also like to highlight the differences. However transgressive OTD appears, it reproduces gender roles in my view. While in OTD gender roles attached to the dance parts are not challenged by crossing gender borders, same-sex ballroom dance, as I will argue, disconnects gender roles from dance roles. In OTD participants temporarily take up the role that is prescribed to the other sex, while in same-sex ballroom dance the woman who takes the leading part mostly does not imitate a male role. Further, male-to-female cross dressing has not appeared in same-sex ballroom dance yet, while in OTD it appears, but in a self-distancing way. This difference shows that crossing

gender boundaries in the OTD scene carries a notion of play, while eliminating gender borders is inherent in same sex ballroom dance.

These differences may be attributed to the backgrounds of the two fields of dance. Same sex ballroom dancing was developed within the gay community. By now it is by no means exclusively gay, but the underlying assumptions come from the notion of same-sex intimate partnership. We will see later that the rejection of heterosexual partnership imitation is a powerful discourse in same-sex dance, which involves the tendency that equality is more pronounced. OTD is a predominately heterosexual space. The persons who try out the other role are doing it with the intention of returning to their original gender role. And this preserves the binarity of the roles.

Research

Sample

I based my analysis on interviews and participant observation. My target group for the interviews included women who pursued same-sex dance. I decided to include only those who had a sufficient experience in same-sex ballroom dancing. To reach this criterion I set up the limit so that I interviewed those who had already taken part in a competition and had a fixed dance partnership at least for the period of preparation. This was important, because the interviewees needed to be familiar with the scene of competition and especially with the circumstances of a dance partnership to be able to reflect on roles and relations. These criteria limited the accessible population in Hungary to around 15 persons, which meant a small sample size but high sample/population ratio. I managed to conduct interviews with nine of these women. They were between in their late twenties and around fifty. They usually had

been dancing for years. Most of them are currently active, too. Some had been in an intimate (i.e. lesbian) relationship with their dance partner, but most of them had a dance partner who was not a romantic or sexual partner. Six of the dancers had some previous experience in two-sex dance, too. One of these women used to compete in the professional two-sex dance for years, one dancer had experience in hobby two-sex dance, and the others visited dance classes for shorter or longer periods. They were a valuable source for comparative analysis. Since I included sexual orientation in the analysis, I asked information on that. For the purpose of the research I allowed simplification: I will use the categories gay and non-gay, although I am aware of the bigger complexity of reality. Gay means those who confidently identified as lesbian, non-gay means everyone else. The latter included confidently heterosexual identification, plasticity and the rejection of categories of sexual orientation. Five of the nine participants identified as gay.

I also conducted two expert interviews. One interviewee was a same-sex dance teacher in Hungary, so he had an extensive knowledge of Hungarian same-sex dance. He was a founder and teacher of Gemini Dance Club. The historical background chapter is based on this interview. I asked questions about the development of same-sex dance, about its history in Hungary, its links to the gay and lesbian community, and to the official ballroom dancing. Further I asked information on dance roles and figures. This part is included in the analysis part. I use some parts of another expert interview with a dance teacher of conventional two-sex ballroom dance classes. The interview was made about his job as a dance teacher of two-sex groups and the characteristics of his dance classes.

Methods, design

I used semi-structured in-depth interviews and participant observation to carry out the research. An interview lasted around an hour. I tape-recorded them. For the analysis, I identified themes and coded the transcripts. I based the development of the interview plan on my observations while being a member of the Hungarian same-sex ballroom dance community. I regularly visit trainings, social dances and I have once taken part in a competition. I have talked several times with dancers about their experience.

Being a member of the Hungarian same-sex dance community created my position as an in-group member researcher. Some problems are caused by the fact that there are questions that relate to dance partnerships, and both I and the interviewee are part of a network of the people that the interviewee is supposed to talk about. There were advantages of being an insider, like the easier access to participants and the easier rapport. On the other hand, informants may not have revealed information because they knew me. Some may have felt uneasy to talk about their dance partnership because I know their partner. My relationship towards the person and the person's dance partner may have affected the information revealed.

Being an in-group member gave larger insight into the matters and personal experience as well. I tried to be careful though with being too "in-group" by using the terminology of the community without reflecting on it. I tried to prevent that the interviewee assumes that I know certain things and she does not talk about it. Sometimes, especially to remarks like "But you know how it is.", I asked the interviewees to describe phenomena as if I were an outsider to this field.

Being a group member researcher raises the possibility of bias. I do not assume "objectivity" as a precondition of my research, though. I have a background that affects my

perception of any issue investigated be it even totally unfamiliar to me. This applies to issues of dance as much as to any field of investigation. A researcher is part of the society, so it is not possible to approach any issue objectively.

I considered ethical issues, too. I made it clear that I will keep all personal information confidential and I asked for the interviewees' informed consent to use the interview for the purpose of this MA thesis. A major ethical concern for me was that since there were so few interviewees, I have to take care that they cannot be identified or guessed. I will use codes instead of names. I will not reveal any other information, only what is crucial for understanding one's position in the analyzed context. This can be dance role, experience with dance, or if relevant sexual orientation.

I developed an interview guide which served only as a guideline for me (see Appendix). It contained the questions I intended to ask. They were in the order that I planed to proceed unless the interviewee mentioned a topic by herself. I built up this order in a way that certain keywords (like femininity) appeared later so that they did not affect the answers for previous ones. The starting question (how she got to same-sex dance) was a warm up question and provided an opportunity for the interviewee to talk about issues spontaneously that I would have asked otherwise. The questions were grouped by main themes. I did not have to ask all of them, because many times they were included in an answer to a previous question. The details in the parentheses were prompts for me to follow if the themes were reached that the question aimed to ask. Or they could serve as an alternative question if the interviewee doesn't understand the question. The order of the topics could have changed due to the flow of the interview. Most informants were very talkative and interested in the subject so they mentioned many features spontaneously.

The interview questions can be grouped into main clusters. The first was the dancer's perception of same-sex dance. The second cluster was about dance roles. The third was about

physical appearance in competitions. The forth cluster was about the relationship between sexual orientation and same-sex ballroom dance. I included a finishing section with some more personal questions which were relevant only for those who identified as lesbian. These questions were about personal experience of dance partnerships and possible relations to intimate partnerships. Most of the questions do not refer to a specific analysis unit. They served rather as stimuli that enable certain themes to emerge. The analysis will be centered on meaningful units of arguments.

Results

An introduction to the field of same-sex ballroom dance

In this section I am going to introduce the history and situation of same-sex dance to set up the context of my research. There are many similarities between same-sex ballroom dance and conventional ballroom dance. Since the discipline is the same, same-sex ballroom dance applies the same set of elements of Latin and standard dances. The dances for competitions are for both two-sex and same-sex scenes: Waltz, Wiener waltz, Quickstep, Slow fox, Tango, Cha-cha-cha, Rumba, Pasodoble, Samba, Jive. The most visible and distinctive difference is that here the dance partners are of the same sex, not a man and a woman, as in the conventional scene. In competitions, men couples and women couples are put to different groups. The official two-sex dance organizations do not accept same-sex dance.

Same-sex dance started to evolve in the first half of the 1990s. The first competitions (usually with very little participation figures) were held in the mid nineties. One of the first dance clubs in the World was in Berlin. They started the first course for gay men less than 20 years ago. This was only for men. Women came into the scene later. One possible reason for

not including women from the beginning was that it was easier for lesbians to attend any dance classes, because two women dancing together do not provoke outrage on the conventional dance scene. Maybe it could be attributed to the secondary citizen position of lesbians in the same-sex community. Nowadays clubs are usually mixed-sex. Lesbians and gay men attend the same classes.

There are geographical differences in the presence of same-sex dance. Typically it is popular in Northern European countries, like Scandinavia, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Austria. We can find some presence of it in the English speaking countries, like England, USA, and Canada. In Southern Europe it is interestingly not present. It may have something to do with the cultural and religious differences between the regions, similarly those of gender-role conformity expectations or the situation of the local LGBT[1] movement. Hungary is getting ahead, too, which is not so common in the Eastern block yet.

In Hungary the first same-sex course started in the late nineties. It was held in a lesbian-friendly bar with a dance room where women parties were held, too. That time there were barely any Hungarian dancers at the international dance scene. Gemini, the contemporary same-sex dance club, was founded in November 2003. The name of the club, Gemini (twins) is meant to refer to the sameness and equality of the dance partners. Later a competitor group started to satisfy the demand for higher level dance classes. First with Latin and standard together, later as two separate courses for didactical reasons. There are four-five classes at Gemini at a time. Two or three of social dance classes (beginner, pre-intermediate and intermediate) and two competitive dance classes: standard and Latin dance. Some people attend more of them. A usual pattern is that those taking the two competitive classes attend the intermediate class, to. Some learn the opposite role (e.g. a follower learns to lead) in a

[1] lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender

lower level class, as well. Other people only concentrate on one disciple. They only dance Latin or standard dances.

There are connections between the Hungarian LGBT community and same-sex dancing. There is regularly a social dance party. Gemini is present at other LGBT social events, too. Same-sex dance appears in LGBT media. Gay newspapers released reports and interviews on the issue. There were reports in radio programs and the issue of same-sex dance appeared in the general media, too.

Motivations for same-sex ballroom dance

In this section I will identify main motivators for taking part in competitive same-sex ballroom dance. One of the possible motivators is sexual orientation: attraction towards women and for some disattraction towards men. Intimate relationship with one's dance partner is a subgroup of these motivators. Identifying as gay can relate to participation in same-sex dance through taking a political stance, too. Same-sex dance can be perceived as a safe space in at least two meanings: it is safe from the male gaze and safe from heteronormativity. It is also free from patriarchal elements, which is perceived as one major advantage by many, be them feminist identified or not. Another group of motivators relate to the hobby nature of the sport, its less formalization and the atmosphere of the classes and competitions.

The informants named love of dance as a major motivation. The question here is more what additional motivating factors there are, especially that relate to the same-sex feature of this dance. What motivates these women to choose a woman as a dance partner instead of a man?

One factor is that the person identifies as lesbian. All five lesbian identified informants indicated in their answers that their sexual orientation somehow relates to their first access to this field and/or their staying in it. In their case, physical attraction is normally directed at a woman and it is transferred to the dance preference, too. Some expressed an inconvenience in physical contact with men. One woman replied to the question by emphasizing her (dis)attractions and orientation:

> …and because I am gay. I prefer having physical contact with a woman, and dance involves touch. Further, the tension necessary for dance is normally present with certain women. A practical cause: men sweat so much that is unbearable for me. A theoretical cause: what I told you about tension. So, for me the motivation, the sex appeal is very rare with a man, and that does not affect dance in a good way. But that does not mean that it is not possible at all. (R1)

Some dance partners are intimate partners, too. They believe that it makes it easier for them to dance together. But they add they cannot compare it because they have not experienced it with non-girlfriends. Some indicate that it is more important that the dance partners have similar aims regarding their dance carrier, e.g. devotion to competing or energy that they are willing to invest into training.

Many dancers dance with a partner who is not their intimate partner. This does not cause any problems for them, even with dances that are more flirting-like or sensuous. They regard dance as a performance. They perform the often erotic narrative of the choreography without internalizing the feelings associated with them. Dance being a performance enables both non-lover lesbian dance partners and non-gay women to perform choreographies that imply erotica. A non-gay dancer explained how she feels about dancing an erotic narrative:

> It is not difficult to overcome that it is about love. We have to act intimately, lovingly… This is playing. And it does not depend on the sex of my partner. It is more sympathy that matters. (R2)

There is a possible motivation to escape the male gaze and enjoy dance only for itself. For lesbian women this relates to the finding discussed above that they would not like to

dance with men because they usually do not feel attracted to a man. But what can motivate someone who otherwise would be attracted to men? As suggested by Casey (2004), a possible explanation for heterosexual women entering a gay space is that by this they can escape the "heterosexual body market" and male gaze and can engage in non-threatening interactions with other women and gay men. However a lesbian presence represents a different situation for these women because the possible sexual involvement of the partner can sexualize their bodies. In this sample one non-gay woman mentioned that a major reason for her to accept an invitation to the same-sex dance classes was that she does not have to deal with the unwanted interest of men there. She perceived it as a safe place. She was not afraid of being approached by lesbians, because in her view women are culturally not so insistent and will not harass her.

My observations show that some non-gay women choose not to dance in same-sex dance exactly because they are attracted towards men. When I was looking for a dance partner, I was targeting non-gay women, too. Only one reply arrived to the ads in a dance partner searching site. The woman, who was married and used to be a professional dancer, replied because she gave up the hope of finding a male dance partner. She claimed that she had nothing against dancing with a woman, the only important thing for her was to dance again. After one occasion she seemed enthusiastic to dance again and liked the atmosphere of the class a lot (see the argument on atmosphere below). But then she received an unexpected reply to her ad from a man. She decided immediately to choose the man. Her explanation was that she wanted to "swoon on a strong man's arms". This is definitely something that same-sex dance does not offer to women. This woman realized that same-sex dance disturbs patriarchal gender relations, and her needs to adjust to the feminine role of a patriarchal relation cannot be fulfilled. An acquaintance of mine that I asked to dance was although impressed by the egalitarian potential of same-sex dance but she expressed that for her dance

is about a relation between man and woman so she could not be credible as a dance partner of a woman.

Lesbian women experience same-sex dance as a safe place, too. They feel that they can express themselves. They regard it as a place safe from heteronormativity. One dancer explained that her first encounter with the Gay Games and the dance competition made her realize that it is possible to live as a lesbian openly and happily:

> You don't have to worry about being gay. Be old or young, just enjoy dancing. It is not like the cripple Hungarian psychic world where you are anxious about being gay. (R3)

Some dancers see a connection between their involvement in same-sex dance and their activism. At least four of the interviewees are active in gay sport event organization. Another dancer described her encounter with same-sex dance as a result of her contact with the human rights and feminist movement. She had been in contact with the queer circles of Hungary for years and this is how she got into the same-sex dance scene. She also regards her involvement as taking a political stance.

> I had been in touch with our little community for years by then. I took part on pride marches, I was part of a human rights NGO. I had a so-called positive prejudice against this community. (R4)

Another group of reasons is that same-sex dance is free from sexist or patriarchal elements. Many remarks related to this. I am going to discuss them in more detail in the next section.

A characteristic of the same-sex dance movement is that it is mostly about a hobby rather than a professional sport. This is a very attractive feature for those who would like to dance just for the love of it, and they can even take part in competitions without devoting their whole lives to training. Also they don't have to pursue dance from childhood to have perspectives for success. Those who like to compete but are not professional or are above the age that enables a woman to appear in dance competitions still can take part in higher level

training and experience the excitement of competition. Interestingly several interviewees regarded this as an important motivator contrary the fact that there is a possibility for hobby sport in two-sex dance field, too.

Another feature of the less professionalized character is that same-sex dance competitions are less codified; it is very informal, especially compared to the official ballroom dancing. In official two-sex ballroom dancing (both professional and hobby level), all little details, like dress code, the dance figures that are allowed on the different levels, the system of the levels, are regulated. Same-sex dancing lacks these strict regulations, which is perceived as one main advantage by many dancers.

There are motivating factors that relate to the atmosphere of both the lessons and the competitions. A non-gay woman got into same-sex dance lessons through the dance teacher's other groups. She explains that she was impressed by the atmosphere of the group and the lessons. She feels that people here are more open and caring than in the two-sex dance school where she danced before. This made her stay and even start to compete. Other dancers, who do not belong to the dance club but regularly compete at same-sex dance competitions, express the same feeling about the atmosphere. They entered their first competition as a result of a joke. A male friend of theirs who danced in both fields registered them for a competition and they accepted it out of interest. There they experienced how much different the atmosphere is and this made them stay. They felt welcomed by the other dancers, even though they did not belong to the community. They perceived people as supportive and open to each other. Compared with the two-sex dance competitions they described that here they could not find the mean competitiveness characteristic of two-sex competitions. The expert interviewee mentioned this as one of the main differences. He used to compete in two-sex dance and he sees great differences:

> …the atmosphere of the competitions. In the conventional dance there is an atmosphere of competition in the whole dance community, which makes personal relationships less friendly, with more conflicts between the couples. … This is also why I would not like to compete there any more. Here the community is more affectionate, more family-like. But at the higher levels you can already sense some of this phenomenon of competition. (E1)

The hobby feature could be a possible explanation for this atmosphere, but there is evidence to the contrary. One woman had previous experience of a hobby two-sex dance competition. She stressed that even in this hobby competition people were really hostile and competitive. She perceived that same-sex competitions lack this competitiveness and this difference cannot be attributed to its being non-professional. Another dancer mentioned that this atmosphere could be similar to the senior competitions of two-sex dance. But at some other point she explained a story that the competitiveness was present also when dancers dance in totally different circles, one couple already in senior. If the hobby feature is not a sufficient explanation by itself what else could play a role in the atmosphere praised by many? The same-sex dancing community could be an example of the "families we choose" (Weston, 1991). Many dancers are gay identified and they regard this scene as a part of Hungarian gay life. All of the interviewees, regardless of sexual orientation, pointed out that although same-sex dance is not exclusively gay but it is rooted in gay movements and still now it can be characterized as a gay space. The majority perceives it as a gay space that is open to everyone, but still can keep its family-like feature.

Elements of patriarchal relations and how they can be challenged

In this chapter I am going to focus on the dance relationship and dance roles. I argue that same-sex ballroom dancing is not simply an imitation of male-female dancing by two women, but it challenges the notion of patriarchal male-female relations reflected symbolically in dance. I will support my argument first with showing how dance roles are performed in same-sex dancing. Then I will discuss how symmetry is reflected in costumes at the competitions and in figures. I will then discuss what other features challenge patriarchal relations, like non-normativity in regard to gendered expectations of appearance, the lack of sexist narrative, the lack of age and body shape expectations and the grading system of the competitions.

Roles

Same-sex ballroom dance imported the basic techniques of ballroom dance. This results in a situation that it has to handle its gendered features. Ballroom dance roles are originally gendered. There are distinct roles attached to the man and the women. The man leads, the woman follows. When two persons of the same sex pursuit ballroom dance, they have two adjust to the leader-follower binarity, there is no way to escape it. What then makes it more progressive and not simply mimicry of patriarchal gender relations? Is not the follower's role feminized thus devalued and the leader's role masculinized and celebrated in women's same-sex dance? Is it possible to reach a more balanced division of power in same-sex dance than in the two-sex form? In this section I will first describe what the dance roles include. Next I will look into the question of values attached to the roles. Then I will discuss in which points patriarchal relations can be challenged.

There are two roles in same-sex ballroom dance: one woman is the leader and the other the follower at any given time. To discuss the main characteristics of these roles I will here rely on the expert interview made with the instructor of the same-sex dance club. The essence of following is that the dancer has to concentrate on the leader and actively carry out the movements that are communicated through the impulses of the leader. She cannot dance anything else but what she is instructed to, she cannot initiate a movement by herself. In this sense she must not think and act independently. Following does not mean to be passive dolls that can be put anywhere, though. The follower is active in carrying out her movements after perceiving the impulse. She has to be able to dance all the figures by herself in the practice sessions so that she is able to perform them correctly while dancing with the partner. She also has to learn the appropriate posture and connection between the hands. The connection is important for conveying the information from the leader to the follower. If the connection lacks tone or is not mutual the leader cannot communicate the impulses clearly. The follower has to react to the impulses given by her partner actively by pushing if the leader pushes or puling if she pulls. So the follower also has responsibility for maintaining the communication. The major difference between the roles is that the leader has to decide what the couple will dance, she has to plan and think in advance. She needs to decide quickly and firmly because she has to communicate it to the follower in time and unambiguously. Not only the figures themselves but every switch of direction within them has to be signaled. The leader has to decide independently and cannot wait for the partner, because a good follower will not do anything without instruction. The leader has to know her own steps and be familiar with the follower's too, because she has to know when to send the next signal.

The characteristics of these roles are no different from those in two-sex dance. Originally the man is the leader which reflects gender role expectations towards men. They have to initiate, act, decide, be independent and firm. While the women have to pay attention

to the man's initiatives, be attentive, reactive and not initiate. A good follower is like a "good wife": emphatic and docile. As a result of the coordination between the two bodies the couple moves in the same direction. Like when a couple rides a tandem bike: the man usually sitting at the handle bar is in the position to decide the direction of the move of both. An interview that I made with a dance teacher of two-sex dance classes shows how these roles are associated with gender roles in the two-sex dance scene.

> There is a difference in their tasks. On the dance parquet the man is the one who leads 100% and the woman has to follow him. The truth is that the willpower of many women has to be broken, because they want to lead. This can cause problems with couples, and there I have to intervene. Many women want to lead. They have to be taught to follow the man. Both roles are difficult. [ ] They have to pay attention to each other. The man is the sender and the woman the receiver. They both have to be turned on. [ ] Men like it that it is the men who lead, because nowadays there are many emancipated women who set up for the masculine role, and they bring it to the dance parquet too. But there they cannot. And this is the last place for it. (E2)

According to the interviewee, men are attributed the leader role, while women the follower role. He also connects it to conventional gender roles and points to the effects of emancipation. He does not question the attribution of power based on gender. He regards dance as a space where patriarchal gender order is preserved.

The dancers at same-sex dance describe the roles of the leader and follower similarly to the description above but they do not connect it to biological sex or femininity and masculinity. When asked what makes a good leader or follower, they mention personality characteristics. They usually link leading to confidence and following to adaptable personality. A woman, who danced also with men, attributes her and her female dance partner's decision of roles to their personality.

> It was self evident that I will lead because I have always been firm. It was difficult for men to lead me. I have to be firm but I do not lose my femininity. [ ] A flexible person can be lead easier. A confident one hands over

control less easily. She stands on her feet strongly. By flexible I mean that she does not stand up for her opinion, she tends to agree with others, does not confront. (R2)

Her partner regards herself as a good follower because she has flexible personality. She expects a leader to be confident and this enables her to be good at following through concentrating on her partner. This disconnection from gender roles is similar to lesbian couples' perception of household chores: the traditionally masculine tasks are not regarded masculine, the person who does them does not feel that she expresses masculinity (Dunne, 1997).

There were a few hints of associating the follower role with femininity though. But everyone stressed that they do not experience being masculine while leading or being feminine while following. One of these remarks was when someone talked about a "born leader" who never will be "extremely yielding, please lead me, I am so feminine" (R4). Another dancer explained her choice of following her partner amongst other reasons by her being more feminine than her partner. But she corrected herself at once that they regarded themselves as two women dancing on the parquet. A dancer who has always preferred leading stated that if she likes following at all it is because she can experience her femininity then. She was the only respondent who had nothing against miming male-female relations in same-sex dance. But she still acknowledged that for many it is not so and does not have to be so. She further supported the idea that the figures be more symmetric in same-sex dance.

I asked the question if either role is more difficult. Three respondents out of eleven argued that leading is more difficult. The others believed that neither is more difficult than the other. Those who regard leading as more difficult do it so based on the perception that leading requires independence, planning, and besides knowing one's role the leader has to be aware of the follower's moves and to give signals to direct her. But even these three persons acknowledged that there is more to it than that. They claimed that it is more a question of

personality, because if someone is very independent person she will find it easier to lead. They also acknowledged that the follower is by no means passive. The majority did not give higher value to the role of the leader. Many of them pointed to the fact that although the leader has to pay attention to things that the follower does not have to, like the direction of the move, the music, the move of the other couples, meanwhile the follower has to concentrate on her partner and react to the impulses immediately, which is equally difficult. There are also figures which are more complex for the follower, especially in Latin dances. For example while the leader has only basic steps, the follower has multiple turns. One dancer pointed out that the follower does the same as the leader but in backwards direction. The question of valuation is more complex, though. Although the majority claimed that there is no difference in difficulty, many of them pointed to other types of difference. Some described the leader role as being more complex, or including more responsibility. They also ascribed dependency as a requirement of following.

In order to grasp the values attached to the roles I asked the dancers what they liked in leading and following. Many mentioned that they like following because then they can relax more and enjoy the dance more, if the leader is good. One dancer said that she likes devoting herself to the other and feel that they merge. She does not yet feel this harmony when she leads but she attributes this to her being too beginner with leading. She also likes the feeling of keeping someone in her arms directing and being responsible for her. She assimilates leading to active concentration and following to passive concentration. A follower has to detect from every little sign what the leader wants. A dancer who used to dance with men now enjoys being able to lead. She likes to decide on the figures and direct her partner. She does not regard it as a power position. This resembles the attitude of a lesbian woman in Dunne's (1997, p. 197) research, who was in an economically advantaged position in relation to her cohabiting partner, but she did not regard it as power. At the same time she noticed that if she

had been in the other position she would have felt it to be power-unbalanced. So subjectively shoe did not perceive it as power, but she could detect it abstractly. The lastly mentioned interviewee of mine finds following a bit boring. Only when the partner is very experienced can she enjoy following. Then she can give herself to the situation and relax. A woman who predominantly follows likes it that she can find out what her partner leads. Another dancer who used to follow only, started to lead because she wanted to try out how it is not to be reactive but active. She pointed to the fact that when she started leading she got scared of moving to the direction of the dance. She automatically switched to going backwards because that is what she got used to as a follower.

To sum it up: there is no clear pattern of devaluation of the follower role and celebration of the leader role. The dancers associate certain attributes to both roles but they do not connect it to gender roles and they acknowledge the advantages and disadvantages of both roles. The division of power is spelled out, though. The respondents could detect the unbalance in control between the two roles. It points to the fact that the asymmetry is inherent in the technique of ballroom dancing.

I argue that same-sex ballroom dance challenges the patriarchal gender order that characterizes two-sex dance. The first major difference is that the dancers are not attributed roles based on their sex or gender. They are free to choose a role that fits their personality more. Second it has the potential to challenge the inequality represented by the division of control by the means of switching roles. Third there is a part of communication, both in the larger dance culture and during the dance, that is more mutual and does not give exclusive control and initiative to the leader.

In same-sex ballroom dance dancers are free to choose a role and it is not ascribed on the basis of their sex or gender. This could not happen in a two-sex ballroom dance competition. As we have already seen dancers usually choose a role based on personal

preference and personality characteristics. Most dancers cannot be categorized to a role, because they learn both roles, so their position as a leader or a follower depends on who they dance with. This is only possible at a higher level. Starters usually choose a role and learn only their steps. But at the level where the competitor dancers are, it is more common that they have already started to learn the other role as well. Few have already reached a stage where they are equally good at both, though. It is only typical to those who are at the highest categories in competitions. In fix partnerships dancers negotiate with their partner who is going to dance which role. Their criteria for decision are personal wishes, personality characteristics (firmness, adaptableness), with which role they have more experience, who is better at detecting the rhythm of music and who is taller. These findings of the effect of personality in choosing the roles of control are in harmony with Johnson's (1990) results, that in long term lesbian relationships personality differences contribute to domination patterns more than socioeconomic factors.

It is not only that dancers can choose and then perform a role of a man or a woman, but these dance roles are disconnected from gender roles. There is a conscious effort of the dance teacher and the dancers to de-gender the roles. It is reflected in the gender-free calling of the roles as leader and follower instead of men and women. One interviewee pointed out that she finds this naming politically correct. There are other evidences against the mimicry of male-female relations which are to be discussed in the chapter on symmetry.

There was some critique raised against that same-sex dance would be totally free from limitations based on biological sex. One remark pointed to the role of sex in separating men couples from women couples in competitions. One interviewee argued that this separation is unnecessary. Another argued that it is fair because physical abilities would put men in an advantaged position in Latin dances and women in standard dances. A further critique aimed at the fact that there is still no space where a woman can lead a man in a competition. The

requirement of being of the same sex is still based on biology. She added that still it is a great achievement that same-sex couples exist, and it is somehow a reaction to heteronormativity.

Although partners usually decide on who is predominantly doing which role, by now most dancers have already started to switch roles once in a while. They sometimes practice in the reverse setting of their roles. And there is a tendency to include some switching in the choreographies. The dance teacher pointed it out in his interview as one of the most important progressive elements of same-sex dance.

> Because the switching of roles during the dance expresses sameness, equality and mutuality the most, this has to be an aim of same-sex dance at higher levels. Only at higher levels, because switching roles is the most difficult. (E1)

The couples usually do this by having the follower take the lead for certain periods during the choreography. Or the dancer who usually follows leads one of the dances. Someone claimed that it would be optimal if they could reach 50% division of the roles, but it is not possible within the same choreography, rather distributing between the dances. Some dancers expressed that they want to include switching since it is one of the main advantages of same-sex dance. They regard it as taking a political stance. Others decided to apply it because they perceived that it is a trend or almost an expectation in the competitions and they felt like trying it out. They were curios and found it interesting, too.

There is a part of communication that is more mutual than the process of leading, which does not give exclusive control and initiative to the leader. One example for this comes from the dance classes and social events: there is no prescribed role of who can ask for dance. Unlike in two-sex dance where it is still regarded appropriate that men ask women for dance, in same-sex dance events asking for dance is not connected to the leader role. Anyone can take the initiative. Another example is intimate metacommunication. A dancer who had

experience in dancing with men, too, explained that in performing love or coquetry during the dance there are differences when she dances with a man or a woman.

> One reacts to a man differently than to a woman, we have to be aware of this. The gestures are different. In my opinion two girls express love towards each other differently than towards a man. It is because they are both women. They look more harmonic. They are not as harsh as a man, but they bring in their femininity. [ ] If I dance with a man I expect him to initiate and I will react to that. If I dance with a woman I initiate, too. For me it is quite conservative: the man is a man, he has to open, start and initiate, and I have responses to that. Maybe later if I get braver I open towards him, too. But with a woman it is absolutely natural that from the very beginning you can be open and initiate. The reactions are more balanced. Not only in dance. As I see the women couples there are different reactions between them than between man and woman. There is more harmony. [ ] If you pay attention to that, you can implant it to dance. [ ] It is not connected to leading. I am absolutely not a leader in this. I lead in dance, but in this I both open, but I absolutely depend on the signs of my partner, too. And there is a balance in it. (R2)

This interview shows that there are no fixed roles of sending signs of intimacy between two women. First she compares her role as a woman dancing with a man with her leading another woman. In the first case she is reactive in the second she acts, too. Then she elaborates on the mutuality between two women, which is not attached to the roles of leading and following. This mutuality in intimate communication during dance reflects that lesbian couples usually have mutual emotional expression (Dune, 1997).

Symmetry

The choice of roles and the switching are not the only tools towards reaching more equality in same-sex dance. There are elements that refer to the sameness of the partners. In this section I am going to introduce two main fields where dance gets more symmetric than two-sex dance: the choreography and the appearance in the competition. Desmond (1993-94) argues that in ballroom dance some bodies can be displayed more than others. Similarly,

Adair (1992) argues that women's bodies are objectified and displayed in dance, which limits their power. In the expert interview the dance instructor elaborated on the issue of symmetry:

> Same-sex dance should differ from two-sex dance. The sameness should be expressed. It is up to the couples of course, there are no rules for that. There are couples where one person takes on the woman role, her dance and movements are feminine, while the other person is masculine and performs the macho. They suggest this by their outfit, too: e.g. the couple where the leader gets on a tailcoat, while the follower a bright red frilly, glittering dress. I personally don't like it, even I am against it. Then rather a man should dance a man role and a woman a woman role. I like same-sex dance if the partners are similar not only in appearance but in movement, too. That is why we avoid figures where the leader is posing as a macho with her legs apart, while the follower affects airs and graces around her with lively hip movements and strokes her partner's chest. Brrrr! Of course many figures are danced with the follower turning and the leader standing and turning her. The best example for the sameness is the underarm turn in cha-cha and rumba when the leader and the follower turn alternately. This is only at same-sex dance. A man never turns under the woman's arm in mixed couples. This turning is excellent for changing roles, too, which is also unique in same-sex dance. (E1)

He describes how figures can express a patriarchal narrative in contrast to those that he regards more symmetric and egalitarian. He is in favor of balanced figures and appearance. He disagrees with the mimicry of man and woman dance. An interviewee referred to the same phenomenon through her experience in the two-sex competition field. She described the two-sex narrative as the man, who has the control while the woman is subordinated to him, is proud of his woman, he shows what a beautiful woman he has. The woman is spinning around, the man holds the hip or buttock of the woman. He has the right to touch and hold her. This interviewee found these figures exaggerated. These are however quite frequent in two-sex dance, especially in Latin dances. The judges pay attention to how macho a man is. It also has to be visible that it is the man who leads. She called these figures sexist. She further thinks that these figures can be performed in same-sex dance, too, but with certain modifications, for example holding the hip instead of the buttock. Or that they do these figures in turns, and then the partners are equal.

Originally there are differences in the appearance of the sexes, too. In same-sex dance competitions it is very rare that a couple would dress up as a man-woman pair. The dancers lay great importance on similarity in appearance. Similarity represents sameness. Most of the interviewees reported having worn the same outfit, or if not totally same, similar in some features. For example the clothes can include colors complementarily. Others had black trousers with the same top but in two different colors. They find it important that to show that the two people belong together. One couple decided to have their dresses made so that it fits their very different body shape the best. The style and the color was the same, but the cut was different. There were two couples amongst the interviewees who chose the two-sex-like setting at first. Both did it in Latin dancing. At one of these couples the follower wore a dress, and the leader trousers and a top that included some motives of the follower's dress. Later they chose the similar outfit version. One of them reflected on this issue in more detail. She expressed that it is also a possibility that people choose to perform a man-woman couple, and it is up to them. The other couple wore the same clothes for standard while they had the dress-trousers version for Latin. Now they both expressed that they find sameness important in choosing their attire.

There is more significance of similarity in appearance than simply presenting sameness. In two-sex dance the women's bodies are objectified by being much less covered than men's. An interviewee pointed out that she finds it important that the partners show their bodies to the same extent. If they choose to wear skirts, both should do it. She does not want to reproduce the two-sex setting where one partner displays the other.

Other challenges to the patriarchal order of ballroom dance

There are further features of same-sex dance that challenge patriarchal relations symbolically presented in two-sex ballroom dance. These are non-normativity in regard to gendered expectations of appearance, the lack of sexist narrative, the lack of age and body shape expectations and the grading system of the competitions.

There are visible differences in the appearance of women at the same-sex ballroom dance competitions compared to women in two-sex dance field. I have already discussed what role similarity plays in reaching equality. Another feature of appearance is the lack of expectations of femininity. The expectations of feminine appearance for women are very powerful in the society. Naomi Wolf (1992) calls beauty work the third shift. There were expectations for women to look pretty earlier, but then it was necessary for the marriage market. Later it invaded the labor market. There is a double standard for appearance: outlook plays a role in women's evaluation while in men's not. Similarly, Dellinger and Williams (1997) found that there are norms for makeup use at the workplaces that are hard to resist. Wearing makeup is associated with heterosexuality, health and work credibility. Expectations for appearance are clearly communicated in two-sex dance. They are codified explicitly: it is subscribed what can and must be worn at different categories and age groups. There is no such codification in same-sex dance. The question for me was if there are norms for that. I asked every respondent to describe the clothes and accessories they wore, or any considerations for appearance they had and their grounds for choice. The answers show that the dancers' ideas about appearance and desires for looking feminine are divers. They also do not feel expectations on appearance. One characteristic feature is the avoidance of skirts, dresses and high heels. There were only two occasions when a dancer wore a dress and high heels. Even those who aimed for femininity did not want to wear high heels. They claimed

that those are not stable enough, especially if someone leads in the dance. This shows that if women have a choice, they do not want to dance in high heel shoes. This makes them more vulnerable. And these women don't want to be and seem vulnerable, and if there are no explicit norms that press them, they won't. They reported that they wanted to feel comfortable. Women in two-sex dance never have a choice like this. The absence of skirts in same-sex dance is also very visible. On the one hand it relates to the rejection of high heel shoes, because the interviewees expressed that skirts cannot be worn with the dance shoes that were originally developed for men. They thought it would seem odd. And almost everyone wears these shoes at the competitions. On the other hand many interviewees expressed that they do not feel comfortable in skirts, or they simply don't like them. This absence results in more covered bodies, and this is in contrast to the objectified women bodies of two-sex dance. Although they do not wear dresses, many informants expressed that they wanted to look feminine. Many wore makeup. They usually justified it with the effects of strong lights on the dance parquet. Others strive for simplicity in appearance. They use very light or no makeup and wear few accessories. They do not regard themselves masculine, though. They represent a more androgynous style. Everyone found the competition a special event where they dress up more than usual, but they did not perceive and comply with the expectation of excessive femininity, that is so prevalent in two-sex dance.

Another feature of same-sex dance is the lack of sexist narrative. One interviewee pointed out that she had bad experience in two-sex classes with sexist remarks. And this is something she never came across in same-sex dance. That is one feature that she really prefers in her same-sex classes. In the two-sex setting the dominant narrative was that women have nothing else to do but to be pretty. They just have to wiggle their hips. She mentioned an example when the dance teacher instructed women to "shake their cleverness" by which he

meant their hips. Another dancer who also attended two-sex classes described the role of the woman in a similar way, although she did not have the same critical stance towards it:

> [In two-sex dance] I can be a woman. I can flaunt myself and I can be pretty. I have no other job but to smile beautifully and be pretty. (R2)

Same-sex dance competitions represent a challenge to the patriarchal order presented by conventional ballroom dance also in the lack of age and body shape expectations. In same-sex ballroom dance the average age is much higher than in two-sex ballroom dance. My youngest interviewee was almost thirty, the oldest around fifty. But there are even older women at the competitions. There are some young women, too, but it is not typical. Some women expressed concerns that they are too old for competing in the two-sex field; others valued this feature of same-sex dance as a very important advantage. A woman of 35 perceived herself as having grown too old for ballroom dance. She also worried about having gained some weight. She used to be a professional dancer till her twenties and that time she was really slim. Although she cannot be considered fat now, she does not comply with the expectations of body shape of the heterosexual body market. These expectations towards age and body in conventional dance reflect the trends of current society and contribute to the objectification of women's bodies.

There are some other features that make two-sex dance a patriarchal institution. The couple is represented by the male member. This resembles the institution of marriage, where the wife takes on the name of the husband. In sociological research the socioeconomic status of a woman is often given based on the status of her husband. The grading of the couple in two-sex ballroom dance resembles this system. The grading of the couple is based on the points accumulated by the man. So having a new male partner can result in upwards or downwards mobility for a woman dancer. In same-sex ballroom dance competitions there are no categories attached to the dancers based on previous results. The grading into categories is

based on the performance of the couple on the site. The couples can decide which category to apply to. Then there are so called grading rounds when the judges decide if the chosen category fits the couple. They can move the couple to a higher category if their performance shows higher skills. There is no leader-follower distinction in determining the status of the couple.

Conclusion

Same-sex relations between women can usually be characterized with equality regarding power, employment, financial contribution, the division of household labor and parenting. They are not imitations of heterosexual relations. Having two women in a relationship results in the absence of prescribed roles based on sex. There is no gendered division in the sense that one partner would take up and identify with the masculine role. The tasks are disconnected from gender, too. This phenomenon challenges patriarchal familiar norms and gender roles (e.g. Sullivan, 2004; Dunne, 1997). In my thesis I wanted to show how the challenge on patriarchal order is represented symbolically in same-sex ballroom dance.

Ballroom dance reflects the image of heterosexual relation and marriage. It is a performance of intimate communication between man and woman, sensuality, closeness, love, flirting and seduction (McMains, 2001; Malnig, 1992). Male superiority over women is usually represented in partner dancing (Daniel, 1991).

There are different ways of crossing gender boundaries in (heterosexual) partner dancing. Powel (2002) discussed how dancers can play with the notion of gender through changing dance roles. I argued that this is different from same-sex dance. I would like to draw a parallel between Sullivan's argument on the undoing gender potential of same-sex relations

and my argument on the differences between the potential of trying out the other dance role and that of same-sex dance. Sullivan (2004) argues that "families headed by lesbian coparents who share primary parenting may disrupt the cycle of gender reproduction in ways that is unachievable by simple heterosexual "role reversals" or equally shared parenting by heterosexual men." (p. 79.) Similarly, crossing gender boundaries through switching roles in dance is not equivalent to the challenging potential of same-sex dance to patriarchal order. My aim of this thesis was to show how and to what degree this is possible.

I argued that same-sex ballroom dance is not simply an imitation of male-female dancing by two women, but it challenges the notion of patriarchal male-female relations reflected symbolically in dance. Although same-sex dance imported the imbalance of power between leader and follower from two-sex dance with the technique, it has a potential to challenge this order by disconnecting sex and gender from the dance roles. Dancers are free to choose a role and it is not prescribed based on sex. They can switch these roles, too. Further, intimate metacommunication do not relate to the leading following division in same-sex dance. Same-sex ballroom dance can also diminish some of the asymmetries of ballroom dance. There is a discourse on the necessity of avoiding complementary figures that reflect traditional male-female relations, and choose more balanced ones instead. The equality is further reflected in the partners dressing in the same or very similar outfits in competitions. There are other features that contribute to challenging patriarchal order. Women are not expected to perform high femininity in their appearance in competitions. They can choose androgynous or masculine outfit if they wish. There is an absence of sexist narrative and an absence of age and body shape expectations. Same-sex competitions further lack some of the practices of conventional competitions, which are patriarchal, like grading the couple on the points of the man.

There are limitations to this work. The number of participants is not too high. This is due to the situation that the dancing population of Hungary is very small, too. The relative number can be considered appropriate. It would be advisable to include dancers from other countries, too, because the object of investigation does not require that the respondents are from a specific country, in this case Hungary. It was only due to practical reasons that I involved only Hungarian dancers.

There are other interesting issues in same-sex ballroom dance that I have not dealt with in the frames of this thesis. Some occurred in the interviews, though. One major topic would be the role of sexual orientation. How does sexual orientation affect the accomplishment and experiencing of same-sex dance? Are there differences in the performance of femininity between lesbian and non-gay women? How are bodies sexualized when both partners are lesbians, when one of the partners is lesbian, or when both are heterosexual? How do lesbian women feel about the presence of heterosexuality? How do non-gay women feel about the presence of homosexuality? This topic would be worth of further investigation.

Appendix

Interview guide

How did you get into same-sex dance?

(Where, when did you hear about it first? What made you start doing it?)

What was attractive to you in same-sex dance?

What do you consider as the advantages of same-sex dance?

What are the advantages of two-sex dance?

Is there something that you don't like in same-sex dance?

What dance partnerships did you have? (with whom, which roles, how long, how exclusive, was she your intimate partner, too, what sexual orientation did she have)

Do you lead or follow? Which do you prefer?

Do you like leading?

Do you like following?

Is either more difficult?

How similar or different are these two roles? From which aspects?

What clothes did you wear for the competition(s)?

Did you wear make-up?

(Did your outfit differ from each other with your partner? In what?)

How did you choose your clothes?

Was there anything that you disagreed about your appearance? What was it?

What expectations do you think there are for appearance in a competition?

Whose expectations are these? (Judges, spectators, peers, etc.)

To what degree did these expectations affect your choice of appearance?

How feminine or masculine do you regard your appearance at the competition?

Was it a factor for the choice of appearance?

Do you consider yourself as attracted towards women?

If there is some evidence for lesbian orientation:

Does it affect the fact that you dance same-sex ballroom dance that you are lesbian/ are attracted to women (too)?

How queer do you think the same-sex dance scene is?

Do you like it that straight women dance at competitions and trainings? Does it make any difference?

Is it different for you if you dance with a straight woman or a lesbian one?

If she identifies as exclusively heterosexual:

How queer do you think the same-sex dance scene is?

How do you see your position as a heterosexual woman in same-sex dance? Does it make any difference? How do you feel?

Is it different for you if you dance with a straight woman or a lesbian one?

More personal questions

If they were girlfriends with her dance partner:

How did it affect your relationship with your girlfriend that you danced together? (Did it enrich it? What kind of problems arose?)

How do you think is it easier to dance together, if the partners are girlfriends or if not?

If they are not girlfriends:

How is your relationship with your dance partner?

Have you ever felt that dance requires a closer physical contact than you would have otherwise kept with your dance partners if you had known them from somewhere else? If yes, was it a problem?

If she has a girlfriend:

Did it affect your relationship with your girlfriend in any way that you were in a dance partnership?

(Was she jealous? Did you gain some social skills?)

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