

Research Report

THE BALLROOM DANCING CULTURE AS REFLECTED BY A GROUP OF NON-PROFESSIONAL FEMALE DANCERS

Carmencita P. Del Villar

University of the Philippines, Diliman

This study on the culture of ballroom dancing in Metro Manila hopes to understand the culture of the phenomenon as well as its relation to the bigger picture of Philippine society. It addresses the question: What is the culture of ballroom dancing as reflected in the behaviors of a group of non-professional dancers in a Metro Manila ballroom?

Ballroom dancing has been a phenomenon in the Philippine entertainment scene for decades. Considering its impact on Filipino enthusiasts, from the 1980s to the present, there has sadly been a dearth of information about it. Available materials about ballroom dancing are in forms that view the phenomenon in a superficial manner. It would be interesting to view ballroom dancing as a mirror of a transformation that is occurring at a higher level or, possibly, a micro picture of the macro that is the Philippine society itself. Looking at the focus of the present study, it is hypothesized that the micro picture of the ballroom dancing culture and the macro picture of society itself are both a cause and effect of the dynamic transformation that is happening to both – a web of both micro and macro influences.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The present study investigates ballroom dancing at a deeper level. It hopes to understand what and why it is, and consequently, how it is

related to the bigger picture of the Philippine society. This study is an attempt to answer the question: What is the culture of ballroom dancing as reflected in the behaviors of a group of regular non-professional dancers in a Metro Manila ballroom?

The following specific questions are answered:

1. What is the profile of the regular non-professional ballroom clientele?
 - a. From what gender, socio-economic classes, age group, educational backgrounds, and professions do they come from?
 - b. What motivates them to frequent the ballroom?
2. What are the behaviors in the ballroom?
 - a. In what ways are those behaviors unique to the ballroom?
 - b. What are the implications of those behaviors on the following concepts:
 - 1) Dance
 - 2) Body
 - 3) Aging
 - 4) Gender
 - 5) Communication
 - 6) Culture

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study uses for its framework the concepts of “dance” by Edru Abraham and The American Dance Therapy Association, the concept of “body” as a construction by Christy Adair, the concept of “aging” by Simone De Beauvoir, and the concepts of “gender, communication, and culture” as advanced by Julia Wood.

Dance as a Form of Expression, Pleasure, Recreation, Therapy

Dance maybe seen as a form of non-verbal communication allowing humans to express ideas and emotions or simply to take pleasure in the act itself. Dancers, when dancing, feel a powerful desire that maybe so intense that it gives them much enjoyment.

Dance is the rhythmic movement of the body to the sound of music. Humans seem to express themselves naturally through rhythmic movement as often illustrated not only in dance but also when they

simply move or sway. It is not uncommon for people to unconsciously sway to the beat of the music that appeals to them. If they are constrained to sway because they are in full view of others, they sometimes nod their heads or snap their fingers.

Dancing is a form of recreation. It has long been a popular source of enjoyment in social gatherings in different cultures.

Edru Abraham, professor of performing arts in UP, states that dance is a form of physical activity that makes one feel alive. "Dance intensifies the feeling of aliveness." Dancers, by dancing to the music, get to feel a heightened emotional sensitivity.

A specific form of dance, social dance like ballroom dancing, is a participant activity in that it is performed with others in a social event. As distinguished from presentational or those performed for others, "ballroom dancing has physical effects... from hormonal, muscular, etc. ... that gives a feeling of enjoyment to the dancers." Abraham further adds that dance has other functions: "Expressive function, a form of release, catharsis, exteriorizing of interior feelings; social function for communicating with others; escape function to allow a person to escape from his unruly world; and control function to allow a person to be in command of his uncontrollable world."

Ballroom dancing is a "looking back activity that allows one to reminisce the past (through dances of the past like tango, waltz, fox trot), unlike hip hop which is a looking forward activity" (Abraham 2007). Hip hop is called a looking forward activity because it is the dance of the young generation. Dancing it makes one feel young and 'cool' and therefore forward looking.

"Dance also embodies music... music is intangible and dance gives it body." This is the reason why musicians move to the beat of their music in the same way that dancers feel ecstatic when they dance to the rhythm of the music (Abraham 2007). Moving with the music, as opposed to simply listening to it, allows the dancer to complete the musical experience, therefore giving it body.

Hernandez, a musical performer, corroborates Abraham's views. He says that "you reach a certain level, different from the normal level,

when you play music and dance at the same time. You dance to get the feel of the music... It gives a level of satisfaction, fulfillment, sense of coordination that makes you alert... You dance with the music to feel... There is a blending of music and dance" (Hernandez 2007).

Dance is also therapy when it is used to improve "the mental and physical well being of a person. It focuses on the connection between the mind and body to promote health and healing" (American Dance Therapy 2007). Although very few scientific research has been done to evaluate the effects of dance as a therapy, volumes of testimonies suggest that it is effective in improving health, recovery from illness, reducing stress, and even improving self-esteem (American Dance Therapy, 2007). On the whole, dance has been found to be valuable in maintaining over all physical and emotional aspects of peoples' lives.

The American Dance Therapy Association believes that dance is "an intimate and powerful medium for therapy." With the association's assumption that there is a connection between mind and body, dance is "the psychotherapeutic use of movement as a process which further the emotional, cognitive and physical integration of the individual." Therefore, dance causes changes in feelings, cognition, physical functioning, and behavior.

The Body as a Social Construction

Christy Adair argues that "the body, which is central to dance, is socially constructed" (Adair 1992, 24). The body's behavior is not inherent or innate; rather it is acquired and learned through time and situation. It is the context that dictates how the body is to be understood. This is the reason why meanings attributed to the body change over time and circumstance. What the body stood for in the past may not necessarily be similar in another period. Adair further advances the "subversive potential of the body" saying that it can be used to "challenge the traditional interpretations of the body" (24).

The body, according to Adair, is socially constructed through a concept called dualism. This is when the body is seen as two separate parts – body and mind. But Adair claims that the recognition that "my dance is my body as my body is myself" (25) is anti-dualist and liberating and recognizes the body's potential as the "lived body." As a result of this

thinking, women dancers created movements towards "thinking bodies." These dancers discovered that they were, first, "people with new attitudes and feelings about life in a world of vast sociological, psychological and historical change... The old forms would not do, the resources of the human body had to be enlarged, revitalized to contain the new dance" (Cohen 1972, 118). Adair indicates that meanings and attitudes about the body continue to change over time. The socialization we continuously go through with all the social groups we belong to all add up to form our social construction of the body. Therefore, what the body meant in the past may be entirely different from what it now means.

Adair further argues that the body as a social construction can be further illustrated by the concept of "the real self" (Adair 1992, 29). The body is a vehicle to uncover what is deeply buried in the unconscious or "the real self." This is evident in some forms of dance where the underlying theme is "the desire to free oneself of social constructions" (29) brought about by the classical dances like ballet. Postmodern dances or those that developed as early as the 1960s "established a new consciousness of the possibilities of dance" (198). As differentiated from the classical ballet, the postmodern dances explored new ways of expression, new images, even political statements. Their aims were revolutionary in the sense that they "challenged oppressive behavior, action and patterns in themselves and others, and to begin to develop a dance practice that contributed usefully to the development of a just, rational and human society" (182).

Women and Aging

According to De Beauvoir (1993), at midlife, a woman feels a renewed surge of energy. It is the time when she feels that the past is over - when she

gambled much more heavily than man on the sexual values she possesses; to hold her husband and to assure herself of his protection, and to keep most of her jobs, it is necessary for her to be attractive, to please; she is allowed no hold on the world save through the mediation of some man... In this perspective she reviews the past; the moment has come to draw a line across the page, to make up her accounts; she balances her books. And she is appalled at the narrow limitations life has imposed upon her... She suddenly undertakes to save her lost existence. She makes a show of this personality which she has just discovered in contrasting it with the meanness of her fate; she proclaims its merits, she imperiously demands that

justice be done it (De Beauvoir 1993, 528).

De Beauvoir argues that the woman “matured by experience...feels that at last she is capable of making her mark; she would like to get into action again” (528). The renewed woman is convinced that she feels young and would like to live fully again, and that “the passage of time has never really touched [her],” and more importantly “her past, her experience, make her, willy-nilly, a person: she has struggled, loved, willed, suffered, enjoyed, on her own account” (528). The woman in her midlife develops new interests, frees herself from the old representation, and starts life anew.

De Beauvoir further adds that

It is the autumn and winter of life that woman is freed from her chains; she takes advantage of her age to escape the burdens that weigh on her; she knows her husband too well to let him intimidate her any longer, she eludes his embraces, at his side she organizes a life of her own – in friendship, indifference, or hostility. If his decline is faster than hers, she assumes control of the couple’s affairs. She can also permit herself defiance of fashion and of ‘what people will say’; she is freed from social obligations, dieting, and the care of her beauty. As for her children, they are old enough to get along without her, they are getting married, they are leaving home. Rid of her duties, she finds freedom at last (530).

Steinnem (1993) states that “women may be the one group that grows more radical with age...Women in general do not begin to challenge the politics of our own lives until later” (Steinnem 1993, 52).

A view not unlike those above are those of Stockard and Johnson which talks about the physical changes in a woman’s life during middle age. According to them, majority of women saw the postmenopausal period as “feeling better, more confident, calmer, and freer than before menopause” (Stockard and Johnson 1992, 234). H. Lopata further explained that “if women do not find other ways to fill their lives, their self-definitions as a mother or a housewife can have very narrow boundaries with empty lives” (Lopata 1971, 71).

Schlossberg (1984) adds that modern women “focus their energies on roles other than motherhood as their children grow older, maintaining a variety of commitments and responsibilities to others. The vast majority spend some time working outside the home, and many return to school for

further educational and job training" (Schlossberg 1984, 315).

Gender, Communication, and Culture

Julia Wood (2003) sees a connection among three important concepts: gender, communication, and culture. She says that "culture shapes gender and gender shapes communication" (Wood 2003, 21). Gender is a construction, a creation by a culture. Its meanings develop out of society's "values, beliefs, and preferred ways of organizing collective life" (21). Males and females become who they think and feel they are because of how they were socialized by those around them – their family and their community. The differences in how they conceive themselves are created for them and communicated to them by their culture. Wood adds that we live in a "transitional time" and that our views on men and women have changed and yet we still feel uncomfortable with the new images of the sexes. This, according to Wood, makes our relationships fascinating and at the same time unsettling.

Our views on gender were endorsed by our society through various means. As early as our childhood we were already made "to conform to gender that society prescribes for us... When socialization is effective in teaching us to adopt the gender society prescribes for our sex, biological males learn to be masculine and biological females become feminine" (22). Furthermore, gender is a

complex set of interrelated cultural ideas that stipulate the social meaning of sex. Because social definitions of gender permeate public and private life, we see them as normal, natural, and right. When the practices are structures that make up social life constantly represent women and men in particular ways, it is difficult to imagine that masculinity and femininity could be defined differently (23).

Looking at all the above discussion on dance as (1) a form of expression, pleasure, recreation, and therapy, (2) the body as a construction, (3) women's nature and behavior as they reach middle age, and (4) the dynamics among communication, gender and culture, it would be interesting to find out if any or all of them could explain why the women in the present study frequent the ballroom dancing scene.

METHODOLOGY

The study is an investigation into the phenomenon of the ballroom dancing culture as reflected in a group of regular non-professional female dancers in a ballroom in Metro Manila. It relied heavily on the methods of participant observation, in-depth interview, and storytelling. The particular ballroom in the study was randomly chosen from among the 15 ballrooms in Metro Manila. Further, the afternoon group was randomly chosen from among the other groups that frequent the particular ballroom (different crowds in groups or as individuals frequent the ballroom at different times within the ballroom hours of 2:00 pm to 2:00 am, Monday to Saturday). From the selected group of 20 women who meet every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday or Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, or everyday, from 2:00 pm until 6:00 pm were chosen. The group started from a small core group of five female friends who hired their own DIs (dance instructors). They chose the 2:00 to 5:00 pm time slot because it was their common free time. The ballroom was also chosen because of its proximity to their offices or residences. In time, the group of five grew to what it is now - 20 regular ladies and their regular DIs. There are also other pairs who just walk into the ballroom, or singles who drop by and hire from among the in-house DIs. The present study, however, focused only on the 20 regular clientele.

Using the methods of participant observation, survey, and in-depth interview/storytelling, the researcher recorded all the data during her visits to the ballroom for a period of one year and seven months, from August 2005 to March 2007. The nature of the interview with the respondents was unstructured, as in an informal storytelling, to allow for a more spontaneous sharing. The researcher frequented the ballroom scene, built friendship with the group members, and extracted information during casual conversations. Notes were recorded in writing or by tape recording.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the regular non-professional ballroom clientele:

All the regular clients are females, belonging to the middle and upper social income groups; ages range from 47 to 88 (mean age = 60.25, median age = 57.5); three are single, eight are married, six are separated

and three are widowed; 16 are college graduates, one has an MA degree, one has a Ph.D., one has a law degree, one has a medical degree; seven are employed in private companies, seven run their own businesses, one is a teacher, one is a writer, another one is a real estate broker, three are retired from work, and one is a housewife.

These women, all educated, practicing their own professions and earning their own money (except for one who chose to be a housewife and three who opted to enjoy retirement) feel empowered to make a choice as to the kind of leisure activity to pursue. They are all confident in the age and status they have achieved. A summary of the respondents' profile is found on Table 1 (see page 171).

What Motivates Them to Frequent the Ballroom?

Different reasons were given as to why the 20 ladies frequent the ballroom. Foremost is the enjoyment that comes from dancing. As one 62 year-old respondent says *"I have so much fun when I dance. I don't know how to explain it. It feels so liberating. I forget all my worries."* A 58 year-old explains that *"I have always loved dancing. I just didn't have the opportunity and the resources before."*

Also in the list of reasons are the health benefits as a result of dancing. An 88 year-old lady, fully coiffed and made up with matching ballroom attire proudly says that *"I'm 88 and I feel great. I'm strong, healthy, and happy. I attribute it to ballroom dancing. Instead of paying my doctor I pay my two DIs."* Another well-dressed lady of 78 proclaims: *"Ballroom dancing is the best that ever happened to my health and well being. I feel so good about myself."*

Dancing is also a form of expression. As one 47 year-old attests: *"Dance is like a language. I get to express emotions and feelings through dance. It may be Cha-cha or Rhumba. It does not really matter. It feels...good. It is like an outlet for tension. I get to release all the pent-up stress from work, from family."*

Other reasons why the ladies frequent the ballroom range from entertainment to leisure to relaxation to socializing benefits. Among the representative answers given were:

- a. "Dancing is so enjoyable. I also like seeing others dance. I also like the music."
- b. "It is the best form of entertainment, leisure, and exercise all rolled into one."
- c. "Ballroom dancing makes me feel so young. It is so relaxing."
- d. "With all the stress from the office and the home, ballroom dancing is the best way to unwind. After dancing, I feel sane again!"
- e. "I especially enjoy this crowd. Everyone is so friendly. I always like coming back."

Another reason not quite similar to enjoyment or health or leisure is the feeling of liberation and power that come from being able to go to the ballroom on their own volition. For instance, one 54 year-old proudly declares that "*I feel good about being able to go to the dance on my own. I am done with other people's approval.*" A 49 year-old adds, "*I hate it when my husband says I should not go ballroom dancing. I like to dance. I'm going to dance. Wow, that feels good.*" A 55 year-old declares, "*I also feel a certain kind of power when I get to be the boss in the ballroom. I pay the DI to dance with me, I pay for our food and drinks.*" A 49 year-old agrees saying "*I can dance as much as I like. I have the money to pay for a dance partner.*"

A summary of the reasons why the women in the study go ballroom dancing is found on Table 2 (see page 172). The first column shows the ranking, the second column lists the reasons, the third column shows the frequency of those who ranked the reason as number 1, the fourth column shows the percentage of women who ranked the reason as their number 1 according to their civil status, the fifth column shows their educational attainment, and the sixth column shows their corresponding profession or occupation.

It can be seen from this table that women go dancing for reasons that reflect their needs. Most of those who go to the ballroom simply for enjoyment and being alive are those who are married (67%); those who go for reasons of health and well-being are distributed among the married and separated; majority of those whose reasons are for liberation and power are those who are separated (67%); those who dance to unwind and release stress are equally distributed among the widows, separated, and married; and those who dance for leisure, entertainment, expression, and social reasons are all single (100%).

Behaviors Unique to the Ballroom

What is most obvious when one enters the ballroom is the age disparity between the females and the males. The females, who make up 99.96 percent of the clientele, are usually in their middle age. One hundred percent of the 20 regulars in the afternoon group are females. The ages of the male partners or DIs range from early 20s to early 40s. Of the 20 DIs interviewed 55 percent admitted to being gays. In addition to the 20 regular female clients, another five to 10 pairs occasionally walk in. Once in a while there would also be a male client, usually middle aged, accompanied by his female DI.

Since the females are the clients or “guests,” they foot the bill. On the average a guest spends PhP800 for the ballroom cover charge (for both guest and DI) and DI fee of PhP600 to PhP2,000 (depending on the DI’s expertise or whether he is an in-house DI or a freelance). On the average a guest’s expense for four hours of dancing is PhP2,000.

The ballroom is unique as an entertainment scene because it caters almost entirely to women, and only occasionally would there be a sprinkling of men. As a guest remarked, *“Ballroom is a woman’s world. The men here accommodate us.”* Another boasts that *“Here, I am the boss. Because I pay, my wish is their command.”* When further asked how they feel about paying for the services of a dancing partner, answers reflected a feeling of liberation and pragmatism. One 55 year-old lady reasoned, *“Isn’t it a kind of liberation? I pay my DI so he’ll dance with me. I love to dance. Nobody dances as well as a trained DI. I foot the bill. I am the boss.”* Another explanation by a 69 year-old was: *“It is work for the DI. I pay him for his dancing services. His work is to be my dance partner and instructor and he does a good job. It is just fair.”* A 47 year-old gave the following answer: *“I sometimes see my DI as a commodity. His job is to dance, period. He dances with me, I pay, fair pay for a fair service, end of transaction. Nothing more.”*

Ballroom is also seen as a world all its own, separate from the world out there. As expressed by a 55 year old, *“I like going to the ballroom because it is an entirely different world. Here I forget my troubles.”* A 56 year-old adds, *“In the ballroom nobody judges you no matter how you dance or dress. It is like being in a fantasy world. I enjoy it here. I forget my problems.”*

Implications of Ballroom as a Form of Expression, Pleasure, Recreation, and Therapy

Most of the women in the group disclosed that they keep on going back to the ballroom because dancing makes them feel so alive. One of the members revealed, “*I feel energized even after hours of dancing. If I do not dance at least once a week I feel sluggish when at work.*” As Abraham (2007) explains dance indeed makes one feel alive because of the hormonal and muscular effects that give a feeling of enjoyment. Like other forms of exercise, dancing stimulates the body to produce endorphins, also called the happy hormones. Abraham (2007) further emphasizes that dancing is a form of release and cleansing of negative feelings that are kept inside (expressive function). Dance also allows for socializing with others (social function).

Escape is another important function of dancing to allow a person to run away from her disorderly world. As some of the women say, they go to the ballroom to find temporary relief from their problems at home or work.

When the women in the study were asked why they prefer ballroom dancing to other forms of dancing (like those in the discos), most of them answered that they are better able to relate to the old dances rather than to the new ones like hip hop or jazz. Abraham (2007) provides an explanation for this. He says that ballroom dancing is an activity that allows one to look back to the past. The middle-aged women find it easier to identify with dances from their past (like tango and waltz) rather than some dances of the new generation (like hip hop or jazz).

Ballroom dancing also provides some kind of therapy to the women in the study. The 88 year-old member is a perfect example of this. She proudly admits to having two DIs on call. She further discloses that she would rather pay her DIs rather than her doctors. On the average she spends at least PhP40,000 a month just so she could dance. She even frequents other ballrooms around Metro Manila. On the whole, dancing has done her good. She feels very healthy and energetic and has not been sick for the longest time. She adds that she is not only physically in shape but mentally and emotionally healthy as well. As the American Dance Therapy Association (2007) advances, dance improves the mental and physical health of its practitioners. Dancing promotes the “connection

between the mind and the body” therefore promoting health and healing. As advanced by this health association, there are volumes of documented cases of recovery from various illnesses, reduction of stress, and improvement of self-esteem as a result of dancing exercises.

Implications of Ballroom Dancing on the Body as a Social Construction

The women in the study claim to have regained control over their bodies. They feel free to dance all they want despite their shape, size, and texture. An illustration of this is the 88 year-old lady who, despite her sagging and wrinkled arms and neck still wears plunging neckline or spaghetti straps with complete abandon. “*I don’t care*” she says. “*I do what I want to do.*” Or the 62 year-old who, despite her slightly bent back and occasionally aching knees, always manages to come well-dressed, made-up, smelling sweet, and always smiling as she dances her favorite fox trot. Or the 55 year-old lady who, despite her obesity, still tangos with grace and confidence. As she herself claims “*Why not? I can dance as well as anybody. Well, if not as well at least as energetic. Actually, I don’t care what they say. I just love to twirl on the dance floor.*” As Adair (1992) confirms “there is a possibility for these changing attitudes and assumptions toward the body to benefit women” (35).

Most of these women maintain that they no longer feel the pressure of trying to impress others by having slim and pretty bodies. They have learned to positively accept themselves in spite of their overweight, bulging, wrinkled, and aching bodies. As the 62 year-old rationalizes, “*Yes, dancers are supposed to have lithe and light bodies. But those are for the young professionals. We are not young nor are we professionals. Hey, we are different. We are goldies. We have earned our right to be special.*” Another adds with a hearty laugh “*We have earned the right to be whatever we have become... and keep our bulges where they are even as we dance.*”

And because the women in the ballroom have already unshackled themselves from the traditional image of a woman’s body as slim, they do not seem to be bothered by the fact that they have to consume the cover charge or it will just go to waste. Consuming the cost of the cover charge means ordering two sets of meals from the menu. Usually, the guest and the DI eat their orders as they dance. Dieting is a word that does not seem to be spoken in the ballroom as the women sometimes even order over their consumable cover charge. If eating is strictly controlled by professional

dancers because they have a body image to maintain, it is not so with the women in the ballroom.

In Adair's argument, "... in viewing the body in dance, we will also be viewing aspects of society" (133) and as illustrated by the middle aged women in the ballroom, there seems to be that shift in the social construction of the body. No longer are these women conscious of their figure as when they were younger. They now feel some liberation from the social construction of their bodies during their younger years. Even if their bodies are displayed when they dance on the dance floor, they no longer feel the pressure of pleasing others. They only seek to please themselves.

Implications of Ballroom Dancing on Aging

All the women in the study belong to the middle and old age brackets, with the median age of 57.5, the youngest being 47 while the oldest is 88. The common perception among the public is that women who frequent the ballroom are old people (Del Villar 2005). Among their observations are that matrons are there to look for adventure or that middle-aged women go to the ballroom to recapture their lost youth. Their observations, although said in a not so kindly manner, may not be far from the truth because as De Beauvoir (1993) confirms, women during their midlife feel a renewed generation of energy. These women have gone through so much in their lives and feel that they have gained their right "to get into action" once again. As one of the members of the study admitted "*It is about time I took care of myself. It is me now. I have devoted so much of myself to him and our family. It is my turn now, whether he understands it or not.*" Another added "*I have already weaned myself from my children. They are all grown ups now with their own families. I'm taking care of myself now.*"

The mature woman believes that she has enough energy to live life again and that her past experience has given her the right to be the woman that she now wants to be. She feels she has earned the right to develop new interests, different from the old ones, and start life anew. As illustrated by one of the women in the study, even at 62, she feels energetic now that she has no little children to care for. As she says, "*I can't explain it but I seem to have so much energy to spare at my age! I like to learn new things, I like to go out, [and] I like to dance.*"

Implications of Ballroom Behaviors on Gender, Communication, and Culture

Julia Wood (2003) argues that "gender is socially and psychologically constructed" (21). Women grew up developing and living feminine qualities dictated upon them because they were the right qualities to live by. In the Filipino culture, the woman is generally perceived as traditional, modest, decorous, respectable, and conventional. Foremost in her mind should be that of being a proper mother and wife. The Filipino culture has always been very conservative when it comes to women. Even in the age of working women, women presidents, women in politics, women in general still feel constrained when it comes to going out and having fun. It is not very often that you will find women, single or married, freely enjoying themselves alone or with other women in entertainment places, like dance clubs. The so-called appropriate way when she goes out dancing is to be with her husband or family. The case seems to be very different for the middle-aged women in the ballroom. Women who frequent the ballroom seem to defy the restrictions imposed by society. As a 62 year-old woman asserted, "*Our culture is so restrictive on women. We cannot go out dancing or enjoying ourselves without being frowned upon. I hate it. It is not fair... but I will show them that I will not be pressured.*"

When the 20 women were asked if they felt any social pressures about their ballroom dancing, eight admitted experiencing difficulties because their husbands or families do not approve of their dancing. Among the eight, five resort to different excuses or alibis. When asked what sort of excuses they give, a 57 year-old said "*I just hide it from him. I go during hours when he is at work or out of town.*" Another claimed, "*I give alibis like I'm going to a friend's party or I have errands to do. Most of the time I don't tell him at all. I also make it a point to go dancing in the afternoon so I'll be home before he arrives.*"

Of those eight experiencing difficulties, three "continue to fight it out until he realizes that I am not doing anything wrong and that I will continue dancing because I love it." When further asked why they insist on dancing despite disapproval of husband or family, one 49 year-old said: "*I like to dance. I feel so happy when I do. My husband does not understand it and he gets angry... but I still go... that is his problem. I am fed up with his restrictions.*" Another admitted: "*It about time I took care of myself. It is me now. I have devoted so much of myself to him and our family. It is my turn now, whether he understands it or not.*" A 52 year-old asserted that "I

think women should have the freedom to do what they want within certain boundaries, in the same way that men are free to do as they wish. I hate it when we are restricted. There is nothing wrong with ballroom dancing. It is clean fun."

Two of those married claimed they have their husband's or family's approval. One 65 year-old said, *"My husband now understands that I need to enjoy myself sometime. He knows I need the exercise. He has been in the ballroom...he knows the people I go out with."* A 62 year-old said that *"He has his own leisure. He goes golfing at least three times a week. He knows I also need my own leisure."* A 55 year-old opines that *"He actually likes the idea of me dancing. When we have celebration in the family or in the office he feels proud when I do a special number."* As a result of these women's demonstration of assertiveness, those around them have also changed their views. Examples like these remind us that the way we view gender also influences our expectations. As Wood (2003) points out "many are creating relationships in which partners have equal power and status... our views of femininity and masculinity continuously interact" (24).

The fact that meanings of gender are communicated to us by our culture does not mean that we are passive beneficiaries. We also actively appraise what we receive, and can even decide to influence them. As was illustrated by the middle-aged women in the ballroom, it is within their power to change and act upon the meanings communicated to them by their culture. The Filipino culture may be restrictive when it comes to how women should behave but the women in the ballroom know better. Going to the ballroom may be frowned upon by their husbands or families but they still go because they decide they want to go. They may encounter obstacles in deciding to pursue ballroom dancing but experience has taught them how to deal with those, either overtly or covertly. The means of pursuing ballroom dancing does not matter as much as the end of actually being able to dance is achieved. They may run the risk of a marriage quarrel but experience tells them it is well worth it. As one 57 year-old admits, *"I don't care if he is angry. It is his problem if he does not understand. I am tired of explaining."*

Fortunate are those who do not have to answer to anyone, not to a strict husband or family, because they can freely pursue ballroom dancing. Twelve of the women did not need any husband's approval because they are widowed, separated, or single. One separated 53 year-old happily says,

"In a way I feel lucky to have gotten rid of my husband. I feel free." A single 58 year-old adds, *"So I made the right decision not to tie myself to anybody."*

What these women experience is in consonance with what Simon and Danzieger (1991) say:

In our choices to accept cultural prescriptions or to reject them, we affect the meanings our society endorses...Other people, who reject conventional prescriptions and step outside of social meanings for gender, often provoke changes in cultural expectations...In voicing their objections ...[they] departed from conventional expectations of women as quiet and unassertive (23).

Julia Wood (2003) agrees and states, "...in defying their era's definition of women, these individuals transformed social views of women and the rights to which they are entitled" (23).

CONCLUSION

To the women in the study, ballroom dancing proved to be all beneficial as they move on from their former role as nurturers of others to nurturers of themselves. Now that they have earned the right because of what they have accomplished, they feel empowered to break away from their old function and assume their new role. Ballroom dancing provides these women with the venue for their new role where they can express themselves, have recreation, and even be healed of the stresses of life.

What is more, these women's attitudes toward their bodies have changed. Such change has been shown in the way they feel about their aging bodies. What is bolder than dancing despite the discrepancy between what is supposedly the construction of a dancer's body (as slim and light) and the reality of their middle-aged bodies (as thick and heavy)? Despite their thickening waistlines, sagging forearms, and aching joints, they continue to cha-cha and swing away leaving behind all reservations of what others might think. What others say are no longer as important because these women have already risen above the old societal constructions. As Mauss (1973) argues, "The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society" (33). Adair (1992) adds that "in viewing the body in dance, we will also be viewing aspects of society" (33). These women have shown that they have the power to reject restrictions by society's social construction of

the body and express themselves anyway. In other words, they have been liberated from their bodies (Spelman, 1982).

Just as important, ballroom dancing illustrates new meanings for gender and culture as the women depart from the conservative expectations of them as meek or submissive. In defying their culture's depiction of who they are supposed to be, they have altered not only their own views but society's as well.

The ballroom dancing culture reveals that an important transition that is happening at a micro level (that is, the ballroom) is also happening at the macro level (that is, society). What the women in the ballroom cause to be happening is in reality a mirror of what is happening in society in general. For how many women today choose not only to voice out but to act on their concerns? How many women march into the streets to join laborers and farmers in denouncing corruption in the government? In addition, one need only to take time to examine the hundreds of cases filed in family courts (cases of marriage annulment, legal separation, or separation of conjugal properties) to appreciate how assertive women have become. These women have chosen to break their marriages despite society's prescriptions to conform to what a family should be. They now feel empowered to seek justice and assert themselves.

As hypothesized at the beginning of this study, the micro picture of the ballroom dancing culture and the macro picture of society itself may be both a cause and effect of the dynamic transformation that is happening to both – a web of both micro and macro influences.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

	Age	Sex	Civil status	Education	Profession /Occupation
1	47	F	Separated	College	Real estate broker
2	88	F	Widow	College	Writer
3	53	F	Separated	Law	Own law practice
4	78	F	Married	College	Retired
5	57	F	Married	College	Employee
6	62	F	Married	College	Housewife
7	64	F	Single	M.A.	Retired
8	67	F	Married	College	Business
9	56	F	Separated	Medicine	Own medical practice
10	58	F	Single	Ph.D.	Teaching
11	62	F	Married	College	Business
12	49	F	Married	College	Employee
13	54	F	Separated	College	Employee
14	65	F	Widow	College	Business
15	55	F	Separated	College	Employee
16	52	F	Separated	College	Employee
17	69	F	Widow	College	Business
18	65	F	Married	College	Retired
19	49	F	Single	College	Employee
20	55	F	Married	College	Business

Table 2: Summary of the Reasons for Ballroom Dancing

Rank	Reasons	freq	Percentage according to civil status	Education	Profession / occupation
1	Enjoyment, feeling of being alive	6	Widow =17% Separated =17% Married =67%	College College College College College College	Writer Employee Business Business Employed Retired
2	Health and well-being	5	Widow =20% Separated =40% Married =40%	College College College College College	Business Employee Employee Retired Housewife
3	Form of release, to unwind	3	Widow =33% Separated =33% Married =33%	College Medical Degree College	Business Medical Practice Business
	Liberation and power	3	Separated =67% Married =33%	College Law Degree College	Real Estate Broker Law Practice Employee
4	Leisure, recreation and entertainment	1	Single =100%	Master's Degree	Retired
	Form of expression	1	Single =100%	Ph.D.	Teaching
	Social	1	Single =100%	College	Employee

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