An exploration of life narratives, of young-adult hip-hop dance-artists from Cyprus

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ABSTRACT

Psychological research on the situated artistic lives highlights that such individuals face a plethora of challenges in order to satisfy both their artistic and social needs (Mishler, 1999); whilst also being highly reflective and critical of their lived sociocultural realm (Dyck and Archetti, 2003). Following Mishler's (1999) findings, the current study was set out to explore: how the semi-structured, McAdam's life-story model (1993) interacts with the story-telling process and analysis of the narratives of four, mix-gender, young adult, hip hop dance artists from Cyprus. It also examined, how the anti-oppressive and freedom of expression principles, that are integral to the hip-hop artist's identity (Gainer, 1995) interact with the conservative social realm of Cyprus (Onoufriou, 2009); and whether the narratives of the co-researchers align with the predispositions of the main researcher about Cyprus' milieu.

The analysis showed that the methodological aspects of McAdam's model (1993) enhanced both the interviewing and the analysis of the artistic narrations. Common themes between the narratives: aligned with the researcher's views, and highlighted the dualistic effects of their identities. Ranging from establishing strong altruistic values and friendships; To causing isolation and feeling the need to leave from Cyprus to maximize their artistic potential.

KEY WORDS:	NARRATIVE	LIFE STORIES	HIP-HOP ARTISTS	YOUNG-ADULT	SOCIO-CULTURAL OPPRESSION

BACKGROUND

In the following subsections the thought-provoking results of Elliot Mishler's (1999) work that shows the conflicting reality of how artists experience their dual-identities as artists and individuals will be portrayed. Following Mishler's (1999) inspirational work, the anti-oppressive and individualistic reality of the hip-hop movement (Gainer, 1995) will be introduced and related with the oppressive sociocultural realm of Cyprus (e.g. Onoufriou, 2009). Lastly, the narrative methodology of McAdams 'life story model' (1993) that was used for the exploration of the situated lives of hip-hop dance artists from Cyprus will be presented.

The pragmatic artistic identity

A pioneer research study towards the exploration of 'artistic identities', and one that has inspired the current research in the most stimulating way was, the research of Elliot Mishler (1999), who explored the life stories of a group of craft-artists from the U.S.A in order to investigate the interactions of the craft-artists' 'identities' with their lived social realities. Mishler's research (1999) shed light on the previously unexplored dissonances that artists encounter daily. The negative pragmatic challenges communicated by artists in Mishler's (1999) research span from work related, to personal and relational. Even though Mishler's research was conducted on a different culture with different social norms from Cyprus, it still dissents from the romanticized, positivistic 'simple life' view the general public has for artists (Mishler, 1999) and illuminates the true complexity and intensity of artistic lives. Misher's main observation that sparked the interest of the current exploration is encapsulated meticulously in his definition of what an identity is (Mishler, 1999: 8) ''..a collective term referring to the dynamic organization of sub-identities that might conflict with or align with each other.''.

Hip-hop culture

For this particular project, the type of artistic identities explored was that of Cypriot Hip-Hop dance artists, due to several key dispositions the hip-hop culture is grounded on.

Historically, as a socio-cultural movement, Hip-hop originated in the early 1970s in New York City where the socio-economically deprived classes, adapted the pre-existing musical genres (e.g. rock, blues and funk) to embody a form of autobiographical singing, contemporarily known as 'rap' (Motley and Henderson, 2008). Subsequently, the hip-hop 'rapping' phenomenon extended and transformed to other artistic and emotional outlets such as graffiti and dancing (Prickett, 2013). Within all its artistic outlets, hip-hop operated as more than just a medium of entertainment, it was a mode of expressing the emotional frustration people felt against the social inequalities they experienced daily (Motley and Henderson, 2008). It enabled individuals/groups to confront each other with the medium of rapping and/or dancing, Lipsitz (1994, cited in Motley and Henderson, 2008); instead of engaging in malicious activities such as gang fighting, a very prominent phenomenon at the time (e.g. Eichenbaum, 2008).

In contemporary times, hip-hop became a sensational global phenomenon that goes beyond ethnicity, language, and geographical borders (Osumare, 2009). Hip-hop influences styles of behavior and fashion, giving its beholder's a sense of

meaning and direction, an identity (Kjeldgaard and Askegaard, 2006). Within the fundamentals of the Hip-Hop culture, the importance of pursuing: freedom of expression, celebration of individuality and fight against oppression, are all inseparable principles of a hip-hop identity (Gainer, 1995).

Cypriot milieu

Key contemporary research and socio-historical accounts that scandalized the Cyprus milieu will be further presented. The following observations arguably render the Cyprus milieu as the polar opposite of the hip-hop individualistic and anti-oppressive principles, on which hip-hop identities are based on.

The troubled history of the island characterized by chaotic periods of military occupation, colonialism and significant political shifts (Thompson et al., 2004) has by itself served as a subject of much interest for many socio-historical studies. More specifically, studies performed from a socio-historical perspective (Loizides, 2007) have attempted to investigate the effects the illegal occupation and war crimes on Cyprus by the Turkish army during the 1974 invasion; and the following division of the island in two communities the Greek-Cypriot and the Turkish-Cypriot, (Akçalı, 2011; Loizides, 2007) has on Cypriots. Critical observations suggested that the hostility that rose between the two communities, has essentially given rise to the phenomenon of 'motherland-love' (Greek-Cypriots to Greece and Turkish-Cypriots to Turkey) referring to nationalistic and ethnic pride (Loizides, 2007).

Following the 2004 induction of the Greek-Cypriot division of the country to the European Union (Loizides, 2007), was a series of 'westernized' progressive notions, fundamentally shaking the pre-existing conservative 'norms' of the island; Changes in terms of socio-economic and political institutionalization (Vryonides, 2007). However, the 'modernization' process in Cyprus has had a distinctively anomalous course facing a variety of conflicting factors, due to the traditional attitudes and practices that are still deeply rooted in multiple sections of the Cypriot society (Green and Vryonides, 2005).

Investigations of the cultural resistance of Cyprus towards the 'globalization' phenomenon have only recently started to gain research credibility (Roussou, 2006). Some of the main observations of such research, proclaimed the strong presence of gender-specific, discriminatory attitudes in relation to academic/educational potential and choices (Vryonides, 2007); completely ignoring the individual's will for such important life-choices. Further examination by (Vryonides, 2007) has related the gender discriminatory attitudes, to the irrational patriarchal beliefs that are severely embedded within the Cypriot culture.

Additionally, striking observations of negative attitudes towards homosexuality, have been detected even by the academically educated population of the country (University students) further solidifying the position, that the current cultural milieu of Cyprus is enriched by much opposition against variables attempting to alter the 'norm' (Onoufriou, 2009). The liberal reality of artists, has not been unaffected by the intriguing patterns of 'oppressive' attitudes; Where female Greek-Cypriot artists have faced much opposition for their 'artistic identity', due to the habitual gender-specific role expectancies, communicated within cultural practices of Cyprus (Photiou, 2012).

Narrative Identity and Personality Psychology

The current study was mainly based on the psychological discipline of Personality Psychology. Originating from the work of the pioneer Gordon Allport (1937, cited in McAdams, 1996), Personality Psychology was set out to examine the extent to which the individual is like some other people, like all other people and like no other people, Kluckhohn and Murray (1948).

Furthermore, one of the key studied elements of personality psychology is the concept of 'ego identity' by Erikson (1968), where he attempted to encapsulate the processes of development of one's lifespan. Erikson (1968) asserted that the purpose of identity is to provide an individual with a subjective sense of continuity and coherent self-identification, and differentiation from others. Key to the study of identities is how they deal with challenges; a necessary 'growing' mechanism which Erikson (1968) referred to as 'identity crisis'. The main identity dilemmas relate to the individual's ability to maintain consistency across time and change (Bamberg, 2010). However, for the current study coping was also explored in relation to any physical, emotional and psychological impact related to stressful life events and daily struggles, Snyder and Dinoff (1999, cited in Rice, 2013); This reveals the true nature of how identities are 'experienced', distributed over time and contextually linked (Bamberg, 2010).

One of the most prominent approaches of Personality Psychology that explores identities is that of narrative psychology (Crossley, 2000). Narrative approaches hold key distinctions from the classical psychoanalytic and humanistic approaches. They bestow more emphasis on the underlying inter-relationships between 'identity' and 'social structures' (Crossley, 2000). Also examining how, that relationship affects the way 'identities' are narrated (McAdams, 2001).

Within the theoretical framework of McAdam's (1993) 'life story model' lies the key notion, that identities are essentially life stories; Meaning that they are ever-evolving and their construction enables individuals to interpret past experiences coherently, and also exhibit how they foresee their future (McAdam's 1993). Also, key to the McAdam's (1996) approach is the recognition that even though individuals' life stories are unique, similar themes between stories can be observed, as they are co-constructed and influenced by socio-cultural realities. Following, Cavareno (2000, cited in Tamboukou, 2010a), proposal that narratives are and should be examined with regards to their significant political, relational and embodied nature; it was assumed that the McAdams method (1993) would embrace all three aspects.

To sum up, the following study was conducted based on three overarching aims. The first one was to explore through the process of narrative interviewing, how 'hip-hop' (Gainer, 1995) dance artists experience their artistic identities in a society (Cyprus) with controversial socio-cultural attitudes (e.g. Onoufriou, 2009). The second premise was to explore how the application of narrative psychological methodology, as proposed by McAdams (1993) interacts with individuals experiencing artistic identities. More specifically, the research was set to investigate the extent to which the key components of analysis and interview sculpturing suggested by McAdams (1993), enhance the story-telling experience and its analysis. Thirdly, the experiences of the 'artists' served to an extent as a way for the researcher to explore and reflect on his own predispositions of being a hip-hop dance artist in Cyprus.

METHODOLOGY & METHOD

The reflexive researcher

Bryman (2012) asserted that two main reasons exist for undertaking social studies: either to evaluate pre-established theories, or to reflect on observable contemporary phenomena. This encapsulates the dualistic reflexive nature of the current project, which is both personal and scientifically driven.

Reflexivity is one of the most crucial components of qualitative research, influencing both the process, but also the affiliated parties as well (Doyle, 2013). Following Walsh's (1995, cited in Finlay, 2002) position that the self-reflexive researcher is one who embraces their humanness as primary evidence for psychological researcher; This is the basis of why, one of the key three aims of the current project focused on evaluating the experience of the researcher.

As the main researcher of the current project, I Christos Lefkides, a twenty-one year old, Greek-Cypriot, have first-hand experienced the previously presented notions about the oppressive realm of Cyprus. As an individual with multifaceted experience and love for 'arts', and also as someone who is highly interested in studying psychological phenomenon from a situated perspective; I have felt inclined to examine through qualitative based research my own personal point of view of the oppressive milieu of Cyprus by applying eligible, psychological, research techniques. This standpoint aligns with the dialogical nature of narrative methodology where identities are negotiated not imposed (Arvay, 2003).

Qualitative Research

Due to the qualitative, reflexive nature of the project, narrative methodology was chosen as the most appropriate methodology. Firstly, it diminishes the power imbalance between 'researcher', and 'subject' by admitting the significant importance of the narrators; portraying them as co-researchers (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Speedy, 2013). This is deeply related in the personal epistemological approach of the main researcher, to pursue qualitative-based research. Key characteristic of qualitative research is the understanding of the significance of subjectivity and relativism in terms of how individuals live and interpret their lives in a situated manner (Dryer, 1998; Sparkes and Smith, 2009). Furthermore, this research methodology underpins a social constructivist position, which generally assumes that multiple realities exist and experiences can mainly be understood interpretively (Renganathan, 2009).

Furthermore, by focusing on achieving role equality, this study diminishes the pre-established methodological barriers of the role attached to the researcher, as a 'detached observer' (Dryer, 1998). This research instead, follows the position of Dwyer and Buckle (2009) that by pursuing equality and an 'insider status', this can potentially provide a better insight on the co-researchers narratives by enabling them to be more honest and open about their experiences.

McAdams' methodology

A further justification for the chosen narrative methodology by McAdams (1993) relates to the emphasis put on the current project in terms of the 'cultural factor'. In

the McAdam's research framework (2013) the 'cultural context' is perceived as the key factor influencing both the identity formation and the narration process.

For the current study the Mcadam's seven-thematic questions approach to personal narrative interviews was adopted (1993). The main questions/themes that were implemented reflected the seven key notions of the model: (1) Life chapters, (2) key events, (3) significant people, (4) future script, (5) stresses and problems,(6) personal ideology, (7) life theme.
The reasoning behind choosing this particular interviewing method was based on the 'wholeness' the model provides (McAdams, 1993), by accessing all three time zones: past, present and future. This enabled the majority of the narrators' life-stories to be covered, where at the same time modifications were made in the interview schedule (appendix 5), in order to focus on specific aspects of the narrators' experiences. The semi-structured characteristic of the methodology (McAdams, 1993) enhanced the flexibility of the interviews, where at the same time the research didn't deviate from the subject under investigation (Bryman, 2008).

As the seven questions model (McAdams, 1993) requires an extensive amount of time (minimum one hour) the one hour minimum benchmark for interviews was implemented and surpassed. In order to further enhance the richness of the material, whilst taking into account the effects of culture on linguistic meaning-making (Goddard, 2011), the participants were negotiated to perform the interviews in Greek (their native language), which were later transcribed in English. The environment on which the interviews took place was at the co-researchers' individual houses in order to ensure comfort and avoid interruptions.

Participants and Ethics

The following criteria were introduced in order to increase: the transferability of arising themes between the narratives, and to capture how the present reality of Cyprus affects the specific 'artistic' demographic. The co-researchers had to accommodate the following criteria: (1) they had to be life-long residents of Cyprus who have firsthand experienced   the sociocultural environment of Cyprus. (2) They also had to be in the age group between 18-25, and have experienced their 'hip-hop' artistic identity for more than 5 years.
(3) An optional criteria that was also achieved, was that the participants had to be of a middle class, socio-economic status.

This study was performed in accordance to the research guidelines of the British Psychological Society (2009), where respect and integrity was assured for all parties. The basic ethical consideration when performing qualitative studies as described by Willig (2001) were incorporated. The guidelines included: (a) the right of the participants to withdraw   at any point, (b) the importance of informed consent, (c) confidentiality, no deception and lastly debriefing. These were established by providing to each individual: an information sheet (appendix 3), accompanied with a written consent form (appendix 4) and a debrief sheet (appendix 2) prior to the interview. This procedure enabled both the debriefing and informing of the participants of the premises and the purpose of the project directly. At the same time it ensured the presence of confidentiality by allowing the participants to conceal private information and choose a pseudonym. Also the approval to perform the study from the institution was accumulated, as indicated in the Application for Ethics Approval Form (appendix 1).

It should also be noted that the interviewees are friends with the researcher. Also, it should be noted that essentially the study revolves around a purposive sample and the non-generalizable nature of such a sample is to some extent acknowledged (Bryman, 2012). Therefore the themes that will be elaborated for the specific demographic of hip-hop dance artists from Cyprus are acknowledged as being reflective primarily for that group.

Co-researchers

In the following section some of the key characteristics of the four individuals who were interviewed will be introduced. It should be noted that all four co-researchers have lived, learned and practiced their artistic identities in Cyprus for the majority of their life-time. Alongside their real names, their artistic names will also be indicated. These were also chosen by them as the identities that will be used in the analysis/discussion section.

Alexandros Demetriou (Baoons) is a 24-year-old Cypriot artist. Alexandros has been dancing for nine years in total and has been also teaching hip-hop dancing for the last four years as a part-time job. Alexandros is currently sharing a house with his parents and his fiancé. He has two older sisters and he has graduated this year from a Bachelor of Multimedia from a local university. Alexandros has also been in the Greek-Cypriot army (which is a minimum two year compulsory service) for twenty-four months before getting discharged.

Tonia Nicolaou (B-girl Nightmare) is a 20-year-old, Greek-Cypriot dancer, who was practicing gymnastics from the age of seven till the age of thirteen-fourteen. At fifteen, she started officially dancing a mixture of different dances at a local dance studio, until she left at sixteen and joined a hip-hop dance studio where she met her first dance crew. Currently Tonia lives with her parents and is attending a graphic designer course at a local university.

The third co-researcher is **Elisabet Panagiotu (Whisper)**, a 21-year -old, Greek-Cypriot dancer. She started dancing when she was nine, learning traditional Cypriot dance until she stopped at the age of twelve. Elisabet started practicing and learning hip-hop (breakdance) at the age of fourteen and she is still doing it. She is currently in a relationship and living with her parents. Elisabet is attending a bachelor course of Psychology, where she is currently on the second year of her studies. She also has two older brothers.

The fourth co-researcher is named **George Xaralambous (B-boy Scar)**, a 20-year-old, Cypriot. He has been dancing breakdance (hip-hop) for the last seven years. At the age of eighteen he was enlisted in the army before getting an early discharge after six months, for personal reasons. He has two younger brothers, of one which also is a break-dancer. He lives with his friends, works at various part time jobs and attends a sound engineering course at a local university.

Analysis methodology

The three general steps of analysis and construction as identified by McAdams (1993) for analyzing the narrative transcripts were followed : (1) Getting familiar and reading the material multiple times, then (2) identifying important concepts such as (a) imagery, (b) narrative tone, (c) themes, followed by (3) constructing a coherent story based on the material collected.

McAdams (1993) defined the 'narrative tone' as an overall view of how the story or chapters of the story unfold through the eyes of the narrator, and what feelings they attached to them. Another integral aspect of the McAdams (1993) approach that was introduced was the analysis of the use of 'imagery' such as metaphors, symbols and personally meaningful images. McAdams (1993) suggested that individuals employ 'imageries' in order to reflect through discourse: feelings, beliefs, values and morals attached to experiences. Finally, a major part of the analysis was the identification of the themes of ''power'' (the intrinsic desire for independence and control) and ''love'' (the desire for connecting with others and emotional fulfillment); the two most exquisite themes found in individual's narratives (McAdams et al., 1996).

As observed by previous research (Crossley, 2000), narrative methodological techniques pinpoint language as critical component for expressing and analyzing one's life experiences. From a reflexive standpoint the main reason for basing the analysis on the McAdams (1993) guidelines, was because of the personal knowledge of how 'verbal' and 'visual' the nature of the artistic identity is (Rantala, 1997). Therefore the key components of imagery and narrative tone were assumed to enhance the analysis of the artists' narratives (McAdams, 1993).

ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

In the following section the analysis and discussion will be combined to provide a coherent analysis of the four narratives. The following section will take the form of a coherent story-type analysis, where narrative tone will be followed by the discussion of two dominant key themes that correspond to the McAdams' concepts of 'power' and 'love' (McAdams et al., 1997), that will be supported by a discussion of imagery in order to portray the complexity of the overall tone the narratives have. The three following sections will be related with the cultural context of Cyprus and the hip-hop culture.

Narrative tone: 'Anomalous Freedom'

As psychosocial constructions, life stories encompass both factual and subjective representations of events, ultimately narrative tone portrays the sort of overall image of how someone views and makes sense of their lives (McAdams, 1985). The analysis was focused on the common themes expressed in the co-researchers' narratives.

At the beginning all four narrators were asked to begin the storytelling by imagining of their lives as books containing chapters, and focusing on the ones related to art. For all four artists, the narration begins as an exploration, an initial contact with art in general.

W: If we think of the first chapter, it's the one before I started dancing, I was a baby..art is everywhere, I was doing a little bit of painting, dancing around the house with my parents. That was the 'start'.

Soon enough, as seen in their following chapters the closer encounter with the dancing communities becomes a sort of inspirational/significant event (McAdams, 1993) that further motivates them to engage with the artistic domain. Such inspirational events lie in the intrinsic drive of individuals to pursue self-

improvement; that is by being affiliated with groups that possess the qualities the individual desires to adopt (Pines, 1996).

W: Then however magic happened... <u>They were hugging, laughing just being happy.. and then it was me sitting in the corner being shy and defensive</u>. The first year I was so happy and excited with it..

In relation to Whisper's, 'shyness' assertion, research on the personality of individuals that become aspired to develop dancing identities, has repeatedly shown that they are highly: introverted, emotional and possess elevated drive for achievement (Bakker, 1991; Marchant-Haycox and Wilson, 1992). The higher achievement-motivation (Bakker, 1991) is more evident in Baoons' and Nightmare's stories, where their commitment to the artistic identity began as a need for challenge and adventure.

B: ..as soon as I found something challenging that attracted my attention I held on to it.

Also even though research on dance participation as a physical sport has shown mix results on improvement of psychological well-being (Bakker, 1988), at the same time overall psychosocial improvement is well accepted by theorists as a common effect of participation in competitive and group sports (e.g. Fiorilli et al., 2013). As shown below the hip-hop dancers' identity has been incredibly beneficial for the co-researchers.

S: ... I learned how to use my ego productively..after you lose each competition you get more motivation to work harder and harder...this chapter <u>'positive drive'</u>.

S: If dance wasn't in my life, I would probably be a really bad person...it showed me how to express my anger through moving...

W: Well, I would like to also add that before I went to the new studio, I didn't have developed feelings..but because I was <u>in that true hip hop culture</u>, where everyone is hugging and being so expressive...<u>Life became 'it'</u>.

Their optimistic language peaked with the improvement of the narrators' subjective wellbeing. For Scar and Whisper, joining a dance community and going to events with them, was a life changing experience intrinsically. It helped them escape their shyness and made them develop important friendships and positive outlooks on life. For Baoons and Nightmare, adopting the hip-hop dancer identity was driven more by curiosity. However, for all of them it became the main medium for expression.

B: ... I sort of realized that I started building my own character with breakdance and hip hop in general...through my dancing <u>I can express pretty much everything</u>.

From this point onward their optimistic tone takes a rather ambivalent form, once they embraced the anti-oppression and freedom of expression principles of Hip-Hop (Gainer, 1995). For the narrators, this self-realization has taken a form once they started exploring more intensely the culture of hip-hop by performing, teaching or simply participating in events.

B: Now I use the hip-hop to free myself...based on the foundations of 'hip hop' that I set for myself as a life guide... This is basically what motivates me to teach..Motivation for example for me came from looking at violence and the pain of people...[hip-hop] it unified people...I <u>live in a society with many unethical issues</u>

floating around, and the way for me to express my thoughts, and feelings correctly..is through hip-hop. I can reflect my anger for the pain around me and give a message of hope through this...

Similarly, Whisper, Scar and Tonia said that the once they reached the point of embracing the hip-hop identity the way they felt for the culture of Cyprus changed.

W:..I started to hate Cyprus, I got really involved into politics and I also started hating the behaviors of Cypriots..in Cyprus.

W: ..When I and my crew performed at a quite well-known cultural event in Cyprus and through our choreography ...we tried to give a message against ignorance and apathy...The beautiful part was that older people came up to us and congratulated us, and even went on to tells us how we moved them...[hip hop] it showed me how to be critical about things..It might be hopeful thinking but, I see the potential to change things with what I do.

Nuclear episodes (McAdams, 1985) such as the life-event pre-described by Whisper have a significant impact on one's sense of identity, either by strengthening or weakening their identity commitment. The realization for all narrators that the nature of dance-arts allows them as performers to go beyond the creative act to express powerful unarticulated meanings and feelings (Dyck and Archetti, 2003), was a significant one.

This realization is the same as Steffan Clemente one of the pioneer hip hop dance artists had, that dance served as an ''..expression of oppression. We were poor kids looking for outlets...We didn't know we were creating art.''(Eichenbaum, 2008: 281). This realization is perfectly encapsulated by Baoons.

B: ..When I see the social norms of where I live, I can't just escape the hip-hop logic I have, I can't pretend the problems are not there.

The sort of feeling of purpose and duty, depicted by the narrators relates to the concept of commitment stories (McAdams et al., 1997). In commitment stories the protagonist of a story realizes the significance of his identity in a positive way, and is guided by absolute altruistic ideology with the goal to benefit others with his 'blessing' (McAdams et al., 1997). Commitment type of stories are often related to higher generativity stories, in which the actor is motivated to use his 'gifts' to improve the state of their lived social realm, for themselves and future generations (McAdams et al., 1993). At the same time the actors face negative scenes and obstacles with either 'redemptive' (turning negative events into positive motivation), or 'contaminating' (adulterating the negative impact of events to other aspects of one's life) qualities (McAdams et al., 1997).

The narrators, highly redemptive qualities are visible by the way they deal with physical injury, where for example when Scar described the incident where he broke his hand.

S:*..to be honest if it wasn't for dance I wouldn't find the courage to start using my hand again, it gave me the appropriate will to do it...Mind over body..*

Overall, commitment stories are often associated with higher generativity, signifying more redemptive behaviors and overall optimistic tones (McAdams et al., 1992; McAdams et al., 1993).

B: Like Picasso said, art is a lie that helps us discover the truth, whatever I get from society even the negatives, through dance I turn it into good.

To sum up, the co-researchers' narratives encompass: highly optimistic tones, commitment style stories, highly redemptive qualities both personal and relational. However, further exploration of the transcripts showed the outstanding impact the cultural factor has on their lived identities.

Themes and Imagery

McAdams (2001) suggested that the main thematic lines that dictate personal narratives are the theme of 'Love', referring to the desire of communion and dependence; and the theme of 'Power', reflecting the desire for agency and independence (McAdams et al., 1996). In general the coding of the main themes according to McAdams et al., (1996) is assessed based on the presence or absence of eight sub-themes. Instead of focusing on all of the sub-themes, the analysis was focused on the two subthemes (appendix 6): the 'community' one and the 'empowerment' one, in order to enhance the understanding of both the overall tone itself and the impact of the socio-cultural factor (McAdams et al., 1996).

The 'empowerment' sub-theme refers to a source of power that is not necessarily self-provided, but can also originate from the overall natural environment, role-models, or by developing strong associations with other agents (McClelland, 1975). The 'community' sub-theme similarly, refers to the need of humans to create strong associations, to larger communities, or groups, relating to the need of relatedness and acceptance (Fromm, 1973).

By examining these two sub-themes, the underlying relationship of the narrators with their sociocultural environment, shows its true paradoxical nature. Taken for example Nightmare's narrative when asked 'who are the most significant people in her artistic journey' she indicated the following:

N: ...my biggest influence is my dance crew.... they see me take my soul out..we are a family...as a crew you move as a unit..so that sort of motivated as in a competitive way...because I feel more comfortable to express who I really am...they share the same openness as I do.

N: My mom ...because she is always there for me.. just allowed me to 'be' what I was supposed to be.

Research on identity formation of dancers', has suggested that memorable experiences relating to one's practiced art, signal greater commitment, drive, and self-awareness (Pickard and Bailey, 2009). Nightmare has described such an event, a competition she attended in Germany with the philanthropic cause to collect money for a breakdancer with cancer that couldn't afford his treatment.

N:....All the dancers that competed put 150%... made me realize what I got myself into, the love and power of hip-hop...

The pre-described events from Nightmare's narrative show how the 'empowerment' and the 'community' sub-themes are significant in her life-story. That is from participating in the hip-hop culture and adopting the love and unity values of Hip-hop; also from being encouraged/ motivated by her crew and her

family through her journey. Having a positive affect from cultural-groups/communities (McAdams, 1985), and having adequate support through childhood from care-givers, significantly affect how individuals formulate and make sense of their identities (McAdams, 1993). If both of the pre-described factors are present, then a person's narrative usually has an optimistic/positive tone (McAdams, 1993).

The underlying pessimistic tone became visible once the sub-themes of 'community' and 'empowerment' were explored in terms of how the narrator's identity interacts with: the Cyprus society as a whole, and the hip-hop dance community in it.

N: For example, when me and Baoons started bringing the experimental breakdance style in Cyprus even the dancers where really judgmental.. they just stay to the basics….

W: ..when you are dressed in the hip hop way...people used to mock me or give me dirty looks..because they didn't understand...the culture.

Their reports of constant judgment from both the general public but also from the restricted dance community in which they are 'accepted', doesn't allow them to reach their full artistic potential. Not being able to experience safely one's identity within the social environment can itself have destructive consequences on health (Berkman et al., 2000) and self-unity (Baumeister, 2011). Studies have suggested that highly athletic individuals like dancers (Pickard and Bailey, 2009) are keen on sacrificing other areas of their life (e.g. social conventions) that express negative feedback for their artistry and their artistic choices. That is due to the complex interaction of individuals high on achievement-motivation (Bakker, 1991) and their commitment to reaching maximum artistic potential; where if positive affect from their environment is absent (Quested and Duda, 2009), then they 're-adjust' in order to keep a positive, motivational atmosphere (Pickard and Bailey, 2009). The re-adjustment in this case is them resorting in wanting to flee from Cyprus in order to experience their artistic identities more openly.

W: ...I have a very strong urge to leave from Cyprus for good, and it's not like I don't have anyone back home that I care for..I have lots! The relationship I have with this place though it keeps me disappointed.

B: ...as an artist I want to get outside of Cyprus, because every time I've been out even..the feeling of the new atmosphere has given me inspiration.

B: ...even in the dance community in Cyprus where people try to look alike..they dont try to develop their own character..so they enclose themselves into boxes, cages of the appropriate.

B:..dancing is always on my mind that 'cage' and how I can modify and open it..the social norms of where I live, I can't just escape the hip-hop logic I have, I can't pretend the problems are not there..

Therefore the 'box-cage' imagery the narrators described has a double meaning. On the one side it reflects the empowerment theme, where their hip-hop' artistic identity has resulted in a plethora of subjective benefits, ultimately helping them find meaningful purpose in life (Erikson, 1950). On the other hand it reflects the 'dis-empowerment' caused by the 'community' theme, reflecting the Cypriot society and the dancing community. The limited social role expectancies posed on them by the two communities, don't match their own personal goals and values

ultimately causing their identities to be experienced discombobulated (McAdams, 2013). Overall this observation of multiple social realities follows Deleuze and Guattari's (1987, cited in, Roche, 2011) 'multiplicity' notion, which suggests that identities are contextually triggered; but at the same time a level of unity is important to keep across all time and space for positive self-regulation (McAdams, 2013).

B:...hip hop has set me free but at the same time I am enslaved, that I want to be an individual but I can't do that without other people.

The 'enslaved' metaphor distinctively shown by Baoons shows another enigmatic side of artistic identities in relation to identity foreclosure (Bohlmeijera et al., 2011) As a state, identity foreclosure is characterized by lack of openness to new identity exploration and extreme commitment to one's identity (Danish et al., 1993). Foreclosure is theorized as being prominent in athletes/dancers due to the overwhelming amount of time dedicated to such identities, that doesn't allow further identity exploration (Beamon, 2012; Pickard and Bailey, 2009); Leading the individual to choose the most rewarding and encouraging identity, which in the case of athletes/dancers is the athletic identity (Danish et al. 1993).

Ultimately the current study further challenges the pragmatic view of the 'happy artist' and ultimately aligns with Mishler's (1999) position. That artists face a dualistic 'identity conflict' where the social and the individual (artistic) desires relating to 'power' and 'love' cause an inner battle between the pursuit of artistic and social success (Mishler, 1999).

Evaluation-Discussion

The methodology (McAdams, 1993) in all its stages has shown to be incredibly beneficial for the artistic narrations. The analysis of the imagery and narrative tone were extremely helpful for the elaboration and exploration of the multidimensional and complex nature of the hip-hop dancers' identities. In the beginning of their stories the analysis showed how as individuals they were motivated to adopt the hip-hop artistic identity, to improve and ultimately challenge themselves. Their journey further unfolds by them becoming more intrigued by the cultural aspects of hip-hop. As their stories further developed, the 'hip-hop' principles became more reflective in their art when they started performing and becoming more critical of the Cyprus milieu. Ultimately, their dissatisfaction turned their narratives into commitment stories making them more altruistic and passionate, about the 'power' of hip-hop as a lifestyle and a life guide.

The examinations of the 'power' and 'love' themes (McAdams, 1993), uncovered how much more multidimensional the culture-individual interaction is. On the one hand they have shown significant characteristics of 'optimism' in relation to their intimate familiar community (family, crew) and the hip-hop community. On the other hand, they have shown high dissatisfaction with the hip-hop community in Cyprus and the overall social realm of the country, due to judgmental/unsupportive behaviors towards their artistry.

The 'cage/box' imagery encapsulated their dissatisfaction with the two communities and arguably showed the effects the negative attitudes have towards the four individuals that want to experience freely their art without 'barriers' or

'norms'. Also, the cage imagery highlighted the commitment; and essentially the identity foreclosure for some of the individuals that are willing to leave from Cyprus rather than: conform to the social milieu's norms or adopt new identities.

What has been shown to make this artistic demographic so special is the integrated nature of the hip-hop artistry. Not only it enables subjective and creative outlets for the protagonist; also it significantly influences his personal values and beliefs. As Tamboukou asserted (2010b: 692) '' Art as critique is therefore extended to art as a way of life...'.

Future studies could also explore the ways more collective cultures influence similar demographics of 'hip-hop' artists; as cultures' are what ultimate affects the motivation of the 'agentic' individual (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Reflexive researcher

What I found extraordinary from the life-stories of the four incredible individuals that I co-constructed the study with, was their passion for art, and their willingness to go against the norm and stand strong behind their altruistic values and artistic passions. Ultimately this has been an 'awakening' experience. It has put into perspective how I, as an artistic individual that experiences art for its creative/subjective benefits, face less of the negative aspects of being a hip hop dance artist than the narrators do. Despite of the overwhelming negative feedback they receive from society, they completely embrace what it means to be an 'artist' by keeping a positive and committed attitude to their art/beliefs. I have been motivated by their remarkable stories to use the influential power of psychology to educate others about the benefits of the hip-hop, artistic way of life.

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