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THE GENDERED EXPERIENCES OF AFFECT AND FLOW OF ACCLAIMED GREEK CONTEMPORARY PERFORMERS/SONGWRITERS DURING STAGE PERFORMANCE AND SONGWRITING

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Abstract

This study attempts to explore the experience of affect and flow states of acclaimed Greek contemporary performers/songwriters during stage performance and songwriting, while at the same time examines the gendered role of these experiences. There were three research questions identified; firstly, the in-depth investigation of the performers/songwriters' actual experience of affect and flow states during music performance and/or composing, as well as the positive emotions resulting from those states. Secondly, detecting any emerging differences in affect and flow between stage performance and composition and finally examining the role that gender plays in the experience of affect and flow states. The sample consisted of 6 performers/songwriters, 3 men and 3 women aged from 30 to 65, selected with purposeful homogeneous sampling. The data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews. The research approach was qualitative and the data were analysed with the methodology of interpretative phenomenological analysis. The data analysis was thematically categorized and presented in a table. Next the data were analysed and discussed in reference to the relevant literature and the main findings suggest that a) affect and flow states were both experienced by performers/songwriters during stage performance and music composition leaving an intense emotional impact, fostering further positive emotions which help develop psychological resilience, b) the experiences of affect and flow seem to hold a more prominent position in music composing; performers/songwriters colourfully describe these experiences through metaphors, emphasizing on their unique, often transcendental nature, c) concerning the role of gender in the experiences of affect and flow, the differentiation is one of texture; female performers/songwriters infuse a psychotherapeutic aspect in these experiences, likening them to an intense game while male performers/songwriters compare them to a fierce struggle, which eventually becomes a general pursuit of self, creation and existence. Finally, both male and female performers/songwriters describe those experiences as instances of true transcendental expression, which give essential meaning not only to their music profession but also to life as a whole.

Keywords: Affect, Flow, positive emotions, Greek performers/Songwriters, Gender.

1 INTRODUCTION

The current study attempts to undertake an excursion into the human condition in an effort to illuminate the emergence of affect and flow while their complex, often indefinable, workings take place in the background leaving an undeniably distinct mark on the individual. The first researcher stumbled upon this very idea while attending a live performance finding herself wondering whether the performer/songwriter experiences a state of affect and/or flow on stage or when writing a song. Being herself both an avid music lover and an amateur singer/songwriter, she felt the need to explore the inner workings of the body, mind and soul of acclaimed performers/songwriters of contemporary Greek pop music through their narrative accounts concerning the experience of affect and flow on stage or during songwriting as well as the deriving positive emotions. In addition, the gendered experience of those states presented a particularly interesting topic of exploration. Such venture involved a challenging, different approach since it examined those experiences through the prism of the actual music creators and performers and not through the listeners', classical musicians' or jazz instrumentalists' perspective that tends to be the norm research-wise.

This study will attempt to examine and reflect on the experiences of affect drawing from the theories of Seigworth (1995), Russell & Barrett (2009) and Brennan (2004), the experience of flow based on the flow theory by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions by Fredrickson (2001).

Seigworth (1995) acknowledges affect as a prelinguistic language, a learnt quality prior to being able to make sense of words. This embodied understanding of affect is not seen as another mere bodily mechanism but the very function that further gives the individual the sense of existence and feeling of being alive, attributing a significance to it that transcends consciousness or emotion. Affect is described as a circuit between our bodies and souls and is found at a prior to conscious thought state forming a bridge between our bodies and the outside world. Affect functions both as a precondition and a conditioner of our ability to feel happy, sad, angry, etc., encompassing all these accumulated every day affective insignificances that go unnoticed and register with no particular emotion attached to them; Whereas, in reality, these insignificances make up of who we are or how we act in a certain context. While it being difficult to signify something that does not signify itself, the music experience, entangling our bodies, minds, memories, histories, thoughts, and feelings compelling us in a way to feel and move to its rhythm, presents an appropriate context to explore such a phenomenon.

Adding to the bigger picture Russell & Barrett (2009) confirmed that "core affect" is a fundamental, neurophysiological, primitive state referring to the most elementary consciously accessible affective feelings that are not directed to anything in particular. It is ever-present even when the individual is in a neutral state (Russell & Barrett, 2009). One way to see it is as a neurophysiologic barometer of a person's relationship to an environment at a given point in time with the person's self-reported feelings serving as the barometer readings (Barrett & Bliss-Moreau, 2009).

Finally, Brennan (2004) suggested that affect can be transmitted from one person to another in a given environment. The transmission of affect, whether it is happiness, grief, anxiety, or anger, is originated socially or psychologically. Also taking into account that the "atmosphere" in a place, such as in a concert venue, is generated by physiological, social and psychological factors gives us a better understanding of this elusive term. The transmission of affect is also responsible for bodily changes; some are brief while others are longer lasting altering the biochemistry and neurology of the individual.

Turning to the experience of flow, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) argues that flow is defined as the mental state when an individual is fully immersed in the task at hand feeling intensely focused, absorbed and actively engaged in the activity, while, at the same time, derives enjoyment from the process. In essence, Csikszentmihályi (1990) attests that with increased experiences of flow, individuals experience growth and flourish while their accomplishments increase. As a result, individuals acquire

an enhanced cognitive, emotional, and social intricacy. In order for an individual to enter a flow state the goals should be clear, feedback should be immediate while a balance between the subject's capability and the activity should exist. In addition, the individual should be utterly focused on the present moment, experience a feeling of temporal distortion and the loss of self-consciousness and have a sense of personal control over the activity while merging action with awareness. Those aspects can appear independently of each other. However, combined they are able to cause a flow state to arise and ultimately lead to an autotelic experience where an individual experiences the activity as intrinsically rewarding able to engross the person to such an extent as to perceive other needs, such as hunger or thirst, as negligible. Csikszentmihályi (1997) claimed that happiness derives from personal development and growth. In consequence, flow situations allow the experience of personal development while leading to positive affect (Schüler, 2007).

Fredrickson (2001) confirms that positive emotions serve as markers of flourishing, or optimal well-being while the overall balance of people's positive and negative emotions has been shown to predict their judgments of subjective well-being. The "broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions" states that certain emotions such as happiness, joy, interest, contentment, pride and love are able to "broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires and build enduring personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological ones" (Fredrickson, 2001, p 3). The theory claims that positive emotions have more longer-lasting effects on the individual since positive emotions are seen as vehicles for individual growth and social connection. In specific, the broaden-and-build theory argues that "multiple, discrete positive emotions are essential elements of optimal functioning while positive emotions (a) broaden people's thought-action (b) undo lingering negative emotions (c) fuel psychological and (d) build psychological resilience and trigger upward spirals toward enhanced emotional well-being" (Fredrickson, 2001, p 10).

Adding to the study of positive emotions Panzarella (1980) explored the peak experiences in the world of music and arts concluding to four different factors emerging from these experiences (a) renewal ecstasy, providing an altered perception of the world creating the impulses to make music or visual art (b) motor-sensory ecstasy, involving alterations in body rhythms, or changes in posture (c) withdrawal ecstasy, involving loss of contact with both the physical and social environment while a perceptual narrowing occurs while attention is focused on the aesthetic stimulus and (d) fusion-emotional ecstasy, which entails fusion with the stimulus, is also accompanied by emotional responses.

Naturally, there is a growing volume of research emphasizing on how music listeners perceive emotions expressed through music (Schafer et al., 2013) or focusing on classical musicians and their performance anxiety (Gabrielsson, 2003). Musical performance presents a challenging and demanding context through which a musician could experience intense positive emotions and peak experiences (Lamont, 2012). Consequently, in the past decade research has taken a turn to how music is involved in positive emotions (Juslin & Sloboda, 2001; Gabrielsson & Lindström-Wik, 2003; Lamont, 2012; Van Zijl & Sloboda, 2013). Equally an increasing body of evidence confirms a close relationship between musical experiences and flow states (Bakker, 2005; De Manzano et al., 2010; Dietrich, 2004; Peifer, 2012; Rogatko, 2009; Schuler, 2012). Vallerand (2012) stresses that positive emotions emerge during regular activity engagement ultimately preventing negative affect. Piano players experience flow through the interaction of positive affect and intense concentration (De Manzano et al., 2010) while Van Goethem & Sloboda (2011) suggest that music is directly associated with affect functioning as affect's regulation device. Concerning the gendered experience of music, Sergeant & Himonides (2014) research findings suggest that music structures are not inherently gendered while performers do not impart their sex-specific qualities to the music. Lastly, Csikszentmihályi (1990) claims that accounts of flow experiences did not differ between women and men.

2 METHOD

This study aims to explore the gendered experience of flow and affect of acclaimed Greek contemporary performers/songwriters during stage performance and songwriting. In an effort to make sense of the participants' lived experience a qualitative approach was considered appropriate and an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA, Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) was employed to analyze those experiences.

2.1 Research questions

There were three research questions identified:

1. Do performers/songwriters actually experience affect and flow on stage and during songwriting; do positive emotions derive from such experiences?
2. Are there any emerging differences in affect and flow between stage performance and composition?
3. Does gender play a role in the experience of affect and flow?

2.2 Participants

The sample interviewed consisted of 6 performers/songwriters, 3 men and 3 women aged from 30 to 65, selected with purposeful homogeneous sampling for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2005). An important requirement concerning the participants was for them to have rich experiences both in songwriting and on stage performance. Therefore, experienced recording artists and on stage performers having 10 or more years of experience were preferred. It was also equally important to not only be performers, singers in particular, but also songwriters, composing music and writing lyrics. Last but not least, they should come from Greece.

2.3 Data Collection

The first researcher approached the participants through their official websites, sending them information regarding the research and an invitation to participate. After having responded to the invitation the participants were given detailed and thorough information about the research and each participant was accorded a date of interview. The interviews took place in their homes, enabling true and undivided expression in a familiar setting. Written consent was obtained from each of the participants and it was made clear to them that they had the right to withdraw at any time and request their interviews to be destroyed. Next, the researcher and the participants together agreed on a code name such as ($\Delta 1$) and the participants were ensured that their true identity would be kept private. The data were collected through an hour-long, in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews while the interview topics covered a comprehensive description of flow and affect both on stage and during songwriting, the positive feelings deriving from those states, the differences of affect and flow states between the two contexts of stage performance and songwriting as well as the gendered role of these experiences. The questions were used to guide rather than dictate the course of the interview. Participants were treated as experiential experts and any novel areas of inquiry they opened up were followed. Data collection lasted approximately 2 weeks and resulted in 6 hours of data. The interviews were recorded onto a minidisk recorder. All interviews were transcribed verbatim using a simplified form of transcription.

2.4 Data Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was employed since it aims to explore the participants' lived experience in detail as it is expressed in its own terms and not according to predefined categories. This analytical method attempts to zoom in the personal experience of the participants who are trying to make sense of their own world, acknowledging at the same time that this eventually becomes an interpretative endeavor for both the participant and the researcher as the latter tries in turn to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Although it may not be possible to access the participants' lives directly since there is no immediate window to their lives, delving deeper into how events and emotions are experienced and given meaning can provide a fertile ground for ideographic and hermeneutic analysis. Researchers choosing to employ a qualitative approach are interested in the construction of social reality and the relationship between the researcher and the phenomenon of interest, even in the obstacles that may be encountered in the process (Willig, 2001). In this study the analytic process involved the careful transcription of the interviews. After careful study intuitive notes were made of anything that appeared significant or of interest, leading to the emergence of the first more specific themes or phrases. After several transcript readings the data were reduced by establishing connections between the preliminary themes and transforming them into appropriately named clusters. Extra attention was given so that the link between the participants' actual words and the researcher's interpretations was not lost. Lastly, the super-ordinate themes and the emergent sub-themes were arranged and presented in a table along with the corresponding transcript examples.

3 ANALYSIS

According to IPA dictates (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), drawing from the data of the six conducted interviews there are three emergent super-ordinate themes accordingly consisting of sub-themes. In the table below the themes are respectively presented along with transcript examples.

Table 1: Analysis

| <u>Super-ordinate themes</u> | <u>Sub-themes</u> | <u>Transcript examples</u> |
|---|-------------------|---|
| 1. Affect and Flow during stage performance and songwriting. | Affect | <i>«It's the energy in the room.. if those kind of things interest you as a scientist... yes, I don't know... I can't really explain these things, it's just that you feel a good vibe in a place and a bad vibe in another, so to speak... I'm afraid that these kind of things are in me... they might be... It has happened to me before, to feel weird about some reason... and to feel that the audience isn't having fun and it's me that has to do something to speed things up because I felt that the people</i> |

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| | <p>were bored» (Δ5)</p> |
| Core Affect | <p>«it's like being on a platform, I mean for a few seconds there is nothing.. there's nothing going on inside of me.. I'm just left there, kind of going out of consciousness.. as if time doesn't exist.. like falling into the void.. like being on a break» (Δ2)</p> |
| Transmission of Affect | <p>«you feel it.. it keeps you going, you keep it going, you build it up... it builds you up.. I want you to feel that love and magic and you will feel those things because we are in sync and I will induce that syncing feeling between us and it will exist only for us so that we can feel good in this invisible thing» (Δ3)</p> |
| Flow | <p>«it's like climaxing during sex.. it blows your mind.. and you think to yourself, 'damn it's only going to last a few seconds' but it does last longer and you feel a tingling sensation, your stomach feels tighter, your chest stretches, if you see me at this point my chest stretches way more, I stretch as if I want to listen closely.. I'm there, all of me and my body tells me that I have to do my best.. because that's the way it is, so you give it your best. (Δ1)</p> <p>«I'm happy, you see.. I'm very happy and it's like climaxing during sexual intercourse..» (Δ1)</p> <p>«There was another time recently at Chalkida that I felt the love from the audience and</p> |

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| | | <p><i>the musicians, when we sang for the refugees, and I played with incredibly talented and world-renowned musicians.. I felt so much love from the musicians as well, it was a magic moment» (Δ3)</i></p> |
| | Positive emotions emerging from flow and affect | |
| | Happiness | <p><i>«I feel joy, you see, I feel joy.. I feel that what I do brings joy» (Δ2)</i></p> |
| | Love | <p><i>«I'm ecstatic in a way, I'm so very happy and there is an automation in the way I do things, I mean the way I sing and play my songs, I don't think about it, it just happens naturally.. it's like the effect of drugs.. like being in a hazy and weird but really enjoyable kind of trip...» (Δ5)</i></p> |
| | Joy | |
| | Ecstasy | |
| 2. Affect and Flow during songwriting in contrast to stage performance | Experiencing flow during songwriting is seen as a more rewarding and liberating experience | <p><i>«this personal battle, let's say. this internal fight with yourself in order to write songs, that is the whole essence of things, I can't imagine myself living without it and I dread the very idea because I know that one can't be very productive as a songwriter in a much older age...» (Δ7)</i></p> <p><i>«So you have to be ready to grab the thunder and hold it as long as you have to, to unite</i></p> |

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| | Flow and Affect during songwriting | <p><i>with it and become like a fiery ball to be able to do this.. and that's when you are in an absolute nirvana state of intense concentration, over 100%, and now you have entered a state where you can't do anything else, you mustn't do anything else until you finish what you started, however long it takes.. that's what it's about...» (Δ3)</i></p> <p><i>«sometimes I feel like I'm crying.. that.. and then it stops.. I mean there are tears coming from my eyes and as if those tears signal that I'm in the right path.. and that I should travel down that road.. that it's ok to go that way.. that...» (Δ2)</i></p> <p><i>«I'm ecstatic in a way, I'm so very happy and there is an automation in the way I do things, I mean the way I sing and play my songs, I don't think about it, it just happens naturally.. it's like the effect of drugs.. like being in a hazy and weird but really enjoyable kind of trip...» (Δ5)</i></p> |
| | Flow and Affect during stage performance | <p><i>«because you know that something is about to happen.. for a few seconds I find myself in a neutral zone.. how can I explain it to you, it feels as being in a fridge, like there's nothing.. no feelings» (Δ2)</i></p> |
| 3. The gendered role of Affect and Flow | Female Songwriters - Music as a psychotherapeutic experience | <p><i>«it's a psychotherapeutic process, what I mean is that most of the music and songs I've written were at times when I felt kind of heavy inside and the fact that I've written those songs made me feel better, so yes, this process is something I want to keep in my life.. very much so» (Δ5)</i></p> <p><i>«it's like playing a computer</i></p> |

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| Female Songwriters - Songwriting seen as a game | <i>game, you lose track of time, have you ever played an adventure game on your pc? Day, night, time, what, where, who? You totally lose track of things» (Δ1)</i> |
| Male Songwriters - The fierce struggle of songwriting | <i>«And it will be like a thunder that you'd have to hold and keep for half an hour, a whole hour, an hour and a half, however long it may need for you to keep it so you can finish what you started and you have to be there only for that and do only that, until the song is finished and ready» (Δ3)</i> |

3.1 Affect and Flow during stage performance and songwriting

Experiencing affect and flow constitutes the first research question of this study. The intense moments of experiencing affect and flow during songwriting and stage performance, emerge from the participants' vivid accounts, along with various positive feelings stemming from these experiences.

3.1.1 Affect

According to Seigworth (1995), affect is a "conduit" between our bodies and souls and is found at a prior to conscious thought state. Affect functions both as a precondition and a conditioner of our ability to feel happy, sad, angry, etc.

The artists describe those instances as being in an antechamber contemplating on the kind of action that should be employed.

«It's the energy in the room.. if those kind of things interest you as a scientist... yes, I don't know... I can't really explain these things, it's just that you feel a good vibe in a place and a bad vibe in another, so to speak... I'm afraid that these kind of things are in me... they might be... It has happened to me before, to feel weird about some reason... and to feel that the audience isn't having fun and it's me that has to do something to speed things up because I felt that the people were bored» (Δ5)

The whole experience feels biological having an inexplicable embodied aspect to it, a very puzzling physical nature.

«something happens in the cells of your body, in your soul, in your heart, in your very core, it's a molecular, biological thing and that's when, out of nowhere, inspiration bursts out»

Nevertheless, the experience has a particular physical intensity, therefore the artists strive to comprehend what it signals and the course of action that needs to be followed.

«sometimes I feel like I'm crying.. that.. and then it stops.. I mean there are tears coming from my eyes and as if those tears signal that I'm in the right path.. and that I should travel down that road.. that it's ok to go that way.. that..» (Δ2)

3.1.2 Core affect

Drawing from the performers' accounts two types of affect were identified, 'Core affect' and 'Transmission of affect' respectively mentioned by Russell & Barrett (2009) and Brennan (2004). Core Affect functions as a neurophysiologic barometer of a person's relationship to an environment at a given point in time with the person's self-reported feelings serving as the barometer readings (Barrett & Bliss-Moreau, 2009).

The experience of core affect is described as a subtle neutral state functioning as the individual's security device safeguarding the individual's own mental state to safely navigate themselves to a desired course of action.

«because you know that something is about to happen.. for a few seconds I find myself in a neutral zone.. how can I explain it to you, it feels as being in a fridge, like there's nothing.. no feelings» (Δ2)

Contrary to the above, core affect can also be seen as a state bordering on trembling or even as a serene, grounded feeling that again both serve as a way to mentally prepare the individual. Core Affect provides the performers the information needed to assess the current situation between themselves and their environment, such as a crowded venue, which in turn can aid or hinder the process, and finally decide on the course of action.

«I felt a kind of tremble and as a result some really demanding parts in the first part of the concert were, in a way, hard for me to play, my reactions at that point were extremely nervous» (Δ7)

«I feel very grounded in a way.. I can't tell you I'm happy because I don't feel happiness at that point.. I feel calm.. I think that at that point I feel more.. humane» (Δ1)

3.1.3 Transmission of Affect

Brennan (2004) argued that affect can be transmitted from one person to another, let alone in a crowded venue during a live performance.

The performers/songwriters notice a change in their emotional state and as according to Brennan (2004) the transmission of affect alters the individual's biochemistry and neurology as well.

«yes... you feel it coming a few seconds beforehand.. the people in the audience 'open up'... their energy starts becoming more positive.. you see them smile, their eyes open up and their body posture changes» (Δ1)

During a stage performance there is a transmission of energy that has to do with the venue and the audience itself. The audience affects and is, at the same time, affected by the performance. Therefore the audience's reactions affect the performance as well as the performer/songwriter who in turn affects the audience. An ongoing reciprocation of energy with physical and emotional reactions attached to it.

«you feel it.. it keeps you going, you keep it going, you build it up... it builds you up.. I want you to feel that love and magic and you will feel those things because we are in sync and I will induce that syncing feeling between us and it will exist only for us so that we can feel good in this invisible thing» (Δ3)

3.1.4 Flow

The performers/songwriters vividly narrate their experience of flow during songwriting and stage performance in accordance with Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and his flow theory. Emerging from their accounts are instances where the physical aspect of the experience is prominently described along with an intense and focused concentration on the present moment, the feeling of temporal distortion and the loss of self-consciousness. They describe the sense of freedom that comes with the experience of flow which they ultimately describe as an autotelic experience giving them a sense

of meaning in life while often acquiring a transcendental aspect that connects them with the sublime.

The physical sensation is likened to sexual intercourse and the reactions such an experience causes.

«it's like climaxing during sex.. it blows your mind.. and you think to yourself, 'damn, it's only going to last for a few seconds' but it does last longer and you feel a tingling sensation, your stomach feels tight, your chest stretches, if you see me at this point my chest stretches way more, I stretch as if I want to listen closely.. I'm there, all of me and my body tells me that I have to do my best.. because that's the way it is, so you give it your best» (Δ1)

Intense concentration, full involvement and immersion in a feeling of energized focus can produce the desired outcome.

«and that's when you are in an absolute nirvana state of intense concentration, over 100%, and now you have entered a state where you can't do anything else, you mustn't do anything else until you finish what you started, however long it takes.. that's what it's about...» (Δ3)

Although the set of goals is clear the distortion of the temporal experience along with the loss of self-consciousness cause a creative ambiguity ultimately leading to a peak experience.

«and that's when this kind of 'hazy' thing starts.. haziness.. different than before when everything was normal in a way.. when I'm on stage it's even more, totally different than five minutes ago when there was a kind of normality... and how do I feel? It's a nice feeling, really nice..» (Δ5)

The mind and body are stretched to the limit and when the experience is complete the performer/songwriter emerges anew, feeling of having contributed to the change in the world around him.

«and you feel as you emerge that you are someone new and the world around you is different as well» (Δ7)

Feeling free the performer/songwriter can perform with ease, more confidence and less insecurity about the actual outcome delivering a memorable performance.

«..at the end of a live session I feel completely free» (Δ6)

The performers/songwriters seek the experience of flow, regarding it as an objective per se.

«if your creativity is the most fundamental of your traits and you feed off it, when you realize that it actually works there's nothing else you could possibly want.. it's the perfect drug.. you don't want anything else.. Alik, it's the reason why I'm here!» (Δ1)

The sense of meaning in life, encompassing a certain philosophy or attitude towards life, transcends the mere means of earning and livelihood, regarding it an ideal.

«to me this feeling gives me a sense of meaning in life, I'm not saying it's the only thing that matters, my life won't stop at that, but there is a certain philosophy attached to it and music serves as the vehicle of this philosophy...»(Δ6)

Experiencing flow helps make sense of the world.

«and you cry out, Yes! it's like seeing the matrix.. it all make sense» (Δ1)

The performers/songwriters vividly portray those intense transcendental moments as highly valuable spiritual instances which enable them to connect with the sublime.

«I would tell you that there is a God and God is the extension of man.. and at that point it is as if I'm shown with a contraction and dilation that this supreme being, which in essence gives you the ability to write music and songs, exists within you somehow..» (Δ2)

3.1.5 Positive emotions emerging from experiencing flow and affect

In their narrations the performers/songwriters talk of the positive emotions deriving from experiencing positive affect and flow on stage or during songwriting. Drawing from the field of positive psychology certain positive feelings were common among the performers/songwriters. Overall life satisfaction can rise while experiencing positive emotions while at the same time using such resources to meet life's challenges help develop psychological resilience (Fredrickson, 2001).

3.1.6 Happiness

Fredrickson (2001) argues that happiness is the sum of several factors and although it having multiple empirical facets, an important one is having a balance between the sum of negative and positive emotions.

The participating performers/songwriters recall those experiences in which they felt happiness having successfully accomplished a demanding task while at the same time achieving to receive the audience's positive feedback. They also enthusiastically describe the positive impact of experiencing happiness and the morale boost it provides.

«I've never felt anything like this, people coming to shake my hand after the show, because they've felt this intense energy and I was more than happy having been able to experience such a thing for the first time» (Δ3)

3.1.7 Love

According to Fredrickson (2013) love is defined as a form of social connection marked by positivity and resonance, while it may be the most generative and consequential of all positive emotions. It further broadens and builds the rest of the positive emotions.

Love "echoes" among the minds and bodies between the audience and the performers/songwriters and can broaden their mindsets while at the same time act as a rewarding measure for the artists.

«they were all so happy that I was going to sing "you give me love" and I did so the best way I could because I had just come out of the hospital.. and.. I felt so much love coming from the audience" (Δ3).

3.1.8 Joy

Joy creates the urge to play and a readiness to get actively involved in tasks. Through the play process durable resources are created which are ultimately the skills acquired through the experiential learning that joy activates (Fredrickson, 2013).

The performers/songwriters take joy in what they do and this acts as an incentive to carry on and get all the more actively involved in the activity. Gaining more resilience during the process is one of the added benefits.

«Despite the difficulties at the end we all stood on stage feeling such joy that we had the opportunity to be standing on that stage, to having spent four days there all together and having our feelings and knowledge enriched" (Δ3)

3.1.9 Ecstasy

The performers/songwriters experience ecstasy as a peak experience through the fusion-emotional aspect of it as described by Panzarella (1980). Ecstasy derives from the individual's merging with the stimulus or the activity transforming the individual's perception and view of the world at a given point in time.

«I'm ecstatic in a way, I'm so very happy and there is an automation in the way I do things, I mean the way I sing and play my songs, I don't think about it, it just happens naturally.. it's like the effect of drugs.. like being in a hazy and weird but really enjoyable kind of trip...» (Δ5)

Nevertheless, ecstasy can have a withdrawal aspect to it. In order for the individual to concentrate on the stimulus and get to the core of this experience a perceptual narrowing occurs.

«this is something that I feel it's mine alone and I don't feel the need to share it by saying "I was in an ecstatic state and I wrote a song"... this experience is intense and very personal" (Δ3)

3.2 Affect and Flow during songwriting in contrast to stage performance

3.2.1 Experiencing flow during songwriting is seen as a more rewarding and liberating experience

The performers/songwriters describe the phenomenon of flow during songwriting as holding a more prominent role. Flow on stage is dependent on multiple factors, most significantly the feedback between the performer and the audience as well as the audience's engagement and reactions (Lehmann, Sloboda, & Woody, 2007). In contrast, flow during songwriting is a more personal experience dependent solely on the performer/songwriter and their involvement in the activity.

«what I've told you before about experiencing a nirvana state and being in a kind of antechamber, well, all these happen during songwriting, at least to me» (Δ3)

The performers/songwriters narrate how experiencing flow during songwriting stretches their mind and body to the limit transforming not only themselves but also the world around them.

«when I have an idea and I'm writing a song and I get it to the point that it's ok to get up from the sofa and in a way return to the world again, I feel like the world is different.. that something different has happened.. that's the magic of music.. on stage you know that what you feel is in a way exposed, stranded on a larger scale» (Δ7)

Flow during songwriting is seen as an invaluable experience, giving a sense of meaning not only to their music profession but to life itself. At the same time flow provides a liberating feeling enabling the desired outcome in songwriting while amplifying the process making it worthwhile and rewarding.

«it's one of the most beautiful things because it gives you hope. What I mean is that it's a difficult job, and when you feel the flow in it.. it's such a satisfying feeling.. you feel proud of yourself.. that's when you start feeling hopeful.. that you'll make it.. and it will get better and better.. more and more meaningful to you.. that's everything, everything» (Δ6)

3.2.2 Flow and Affect during songwriting

Affect has a very distinct embodied aspect to it and it is closely associated with flow experiences (Schüler, 2007). Experiencing affect and flow give songwriters a feeling of power while in an effort to describe the intensity of those instances they end up using striking metaphors.

«I do something repetitively for 90 times or more just because I like it.. and I keep going.. if I do it over and over again.. my eyes pop out, my chest fills up like a balloon and I get an urge, a compelling urge to write and it feels like a striking thunder..» (Δ3)

3.2.3 Flow and Affect during stage performance

On stage flow experiences are mainly dependent on the interaction between the performer and the audience while affect acts as a neurophysiologic barometer of the performer's relationship to the environment. On stage flow can also have an ecstatic aspect for the performer.

“an indescribable feeling... like a kiss, like kissing someone you don't really know that well but it feels good.. and it gives you a pleasant sensation.. like a primal instinct in a way” (Δ2)

3.3 The gendered role of Affect and Flow

Concerning the role of gender in the experiences of affect and flow, the differentiation is one of texture. Nevertheless, both male and female performers/songwriters describe those experiences as instances of true transcendental expression giving essential meaning not only to their music profession but also to life as a whole.

3.3.1 Female Songwriters - Music as a psychotherapeutic experience

Female songwriters recognize a psychotherapeutic quality in the experience of flow able to transform the performer/songwriter offering a relief of pressure.

«it's a psychotherapeutic process, what I mean is that most of the music and songs I've written were at times when I felt kind of heavy inside and the fact that I've written those songs made me feel better, so yes, this process is something I want to keep in my life.. very much so» (Δ5)

3.3.2 Female Songwriters - Songwriting seen as a game

Songwriting while experiencing flow is likened to an intense game in which the participants are enthusiastically involved.

«Oh! Very nice! At that moment it felt like an eerie thing because even the story I had come up with had a similar out of this world feel to it, kind of like tripping and at the same time it was like a game, the whole thing was very enjoyable.. and the chorus went like 'when I fly among the clouds'.. kind of like a transcendental, otherworldly but very playful feeling» (Δ5)

3.3.3 Male Songwriters - The fierce struggle of songwriting

On the other hand, the male performers/songwriters compare such experiences to a fierce struggle eventually becoming a general pursuit of self, creation and existence.

«well, I may sit down to write a song now and start going up and down the house with a guitar in my hand or while trying to find the right word I may end up going out and walking for two hours straight until I find that word.. you see that's the struggle.. it has a physical cost.. but it's ok, you eventually improve, you get better in the process, in a way it serves as training..» (Δ7)

4 DISCUSSION

The aim of the current study was to pore over the gendered experience of affect and flow of acclaimed contemporary Greek performers/songwriters during on stage performance and songwriting. The main findings suggest that a) affect and flow states were both experienced by all the participating performers/songwriters both on stage and during songwriting leaving an intense emotional impact, fostering further positive emotions which in turn help develop psychological resilience, b) the experiences of flow seem to hold a more prominent position in music composing; songwriters vividly narrate these experiences through metaphors, emphasizing on their unique, often transcendental nature, while the experience of affect acts as a neurophysiologic barometer of the performers/songwriters' relationship to the environment with their feelings acting as the barometer's readings guiding the individual to the right course of action c) concerning the role of gender in the experiences of affect and flow, the differentiation is one of texture; female performers/songwriters infuse a psychotherapeutic aspect in these experiences, likening them to an intense game while male performers/songwriters compare them to a fierce struggle, which eventually becomes a general pursuit of self, creation and existence. What both male and female performers/songwriters agree on is considering those experiences as instances of true

transcendental expression, which give essential meaning not only to their music profession but also to life as a whole. We discussed the performers/songwriters' accounts through several theories, most importantly by Seigworth (1995), Russell & Barrett (2009) and Brennan (2004) on affect, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) on flow and Fredrickson (2001) on positive emotions. It is important though, to consider the emergence/transmission of affect and flow as a practice embedded in a social context (Wetherell, 2012). Thus, we argue that the accounts of the performers/songwriters are produced in the social milieu of economic crisis in Greece, which creates novel, and maybe problematic, conditions of stage and artistic performance.

Due to the economic crisis those performers/songwriters, being usually band-leaders also need to acquire the role of producer, the manager, or even the stage technician themselves, distracting them from the task of performing. In addition, the poor economic conditions affect the live concert's overall attendance and revenue for the band, rendering them both significantly low. Last but not least, the audience engagement in the performance can greatly affect it since through interaction the transmission of affect and the experience of flow can literally elevate both the performers and the audience. In such a demanding context of stage performance, the emergence and transmission of affect and flow as evidenced by the participants can be conceptualised as a 'feeling' (Cromby, 2015), or as practices (Wetherell, 2012) of entrepreneurial, neoliberal subjects (Dardot & Laval, 2014), evident of the way such a situation of high stakes performance and pleasure can be experienced and accounted for.

Further studies including a larger sample size emphasizing more on different factors that could play a role in experiencing flow or affect such as the participants' psychosocial characteristics could give even more to the point findings. What's more an intercultural study could lead to more illuminating results regarding these indefinable experiences of flow and production or transmission of affect.

This study attempted to deviate from the norm and approach the experience of flow and affect through the accounts of the performers/songwriters themselves as they are mostly superseded by studies on the audience's reactions or classical musicians' experience while performing. A turn to the actual creators of music, being the performers and songwriters themselves, can expand our knowledge on such unique phenomena even further and provide us with invaluable results.

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