

Armenian Traditional Games: Their Status and Dependence on Social Reality

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Presented to the
Department of English & Communications
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

American University of Armenia
Yerevan, Armenia

May, 2017

Defining Game

An activity engaged in for diversion or amusement that often takes a strategic and a competitive form and is played according to rules.

- Until mid-20th century it used to have additional meanings of
 - children's theatre
 - Amateur circus performances
 - amateur combat sports
 - joke-telling
 - songs

Paradox in Game Theories

“In play all is lost” (E. B. Tylor, 1878)

- Residue of adult customs and traditions
- Mimicry of existing reality
- Reality’s influence on players

“In play all things begin” (J. Huizinga, 1949)

- Spur to creation of customs and traditions
- Self-exploration and self-expression
- Players’ influence on reality

Classifications of Games

Original classification

- Physical games
- Mental games
- Games of Chance
- Social Games

Caillois’s classification

- Agon (competition)
- Alea (chance)
- Mimicry (simulation)
- Ilinx (vertigo)

Physical Games

- Dominant component – active physical engagement
- Factor of chance is suppressed to its minimum
 - Sports (combat sports, team sports, etc.)
 - Competitive games (*Yot Qar, Halamula, Lakhti, etc.*)
 - Semi-competitive games (*Tagavori esh, Hide and Seeks*)
- Most popular type among old Armenian aristocracy
- Oldest form of games
- Least tendency to transform

Physical Games: Survey Findings

- Popularity based on **age** differences*
 - Higher percentage among adults and elderly people
 - Lower percentage among children and young adults

- Popularity based on **sex** differences
 - Higher percentage among males
 - Lower percentage among females

* note that in the following slides grouping by age does not imply games' popularity in certain ages but their popularity in different generations

Mental Games

- Dominant component - strategic thinking
- Player - active engagement
- Clear presence of game objective
 - Board games (Monopoly, chess, checkers, backgammon, etc.)
 - Card games (some exceptions relate to games of chance)
 - Other competitive games (
- Second most popular type among Armenian people
- More international or Western, rather than traditionally Armenian games

Mental Games: Survey Findings

- Popularity based on **age** differences
 - Equally Popular among all age groups in Armenia

- Popularity based on **sex** differences
 - Higher percentage among males
 - Lower percentage among females
 - Approximately 90 percent of females who preferred other than mental games recorded that the reason for their disengagement is/was not disinterest but lack of information and lack of players considering them as strong opponents.
 - Prejudiced gender roles impact child's experience with games and affect his/her perception of play.

Games of Chance

- Dominant Component – Reliance on luck/fortune
- Player - passive engagement
- Presence of game objective
 - Competitive (lottery, such card games as *mrotsi*, *queen of spades*)
 - Non-competitive – based on superstitions (usually wedding or fortune-telling traditions)
- Unlike physical and mental, games of chance do not offer a measure of justification for the outcome of the game, like other competitive physical and mental games

Games of Chance: Survey Findings

- Popularity based on **age** differences
 - Equally popular among all age groups in Armenia
- Popularity based on **sex** differences
 - Equally popular among both sexes
 - Traditional and non-competitive games of chance almost always higher percentage of popularity among young females - superstitious

Social Games

- Dominant Component – Mimicking reality
- Player – Active engagement (most active)
- Absence of game objective
 - Real life portrayal games (“mommy and daddy” games and variations)
 - Character-building games
- Popularity based on **age/sex** differences
 - Declined popularity among people currently under the age of 18
 - Declined popularity among young females – substituted by computer games stimulating similar qualities to traditionally-known social games (babysitting, animal care, etc.)
 - Less popular among males – substituted by computer games stimulating other qualities (violence, fighting, superheroism)