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The Ethnography of Homosociality among Gay Athletes in an All-Male Collegiate Team

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Abstract:

The study examined the shared beliefs, values, and group norms of gay athletes in dealing with heterosexual males in a homosocial environment (all-male collegiate sports team). It employed the gay athletes' narratives on their actual experiences in joining a male collegiate sports team and interrelating with heterosexual male members. The goal of the study was to determine the shared beliefs, values, and group norms of the gay athletes in a homosocial interaction as reflected in their personal experiences in joining an all-male collegiate team. Likewise, this study aimed to construct theoretical propositions based on the in-depth exploration and thematic analysis of the qualitative data taken from the real-world experiences of gay athletes in dealing with heterosexual males in a homosocial environment (all-male collegiate sports team). The analyses were based on the three subjects derived from the respondents' narratives: (a) belief - the group expectations of how one should behave or act in a particular situation; (b) values - what is considered good, desirable, and correct; and (c) social norms - the event that embodied ones' perception of reality. The study used an online Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to collect and gather the cultural experiences of the respondents. This study serves as a good medium to express the gay athletes' right to be heard, specifically their socio-cultural roles in a 'macho' community which have not been completely delivered to the audience due to the lack of an in-depth study. Also, this study serves as an avenue in delivering the narratives of gay athletes in an all-male collegiate team, which intends to find a new concept dimension in exploring their beliefs, values, and norms that reflect the true socio-cultural narrative of experiences in the homosocial world.

Keywords: ethnography, homosociality, gay athletes, homosocial culture, social identity.

全男性大学团队中同性恋运动员的同性恋民族志

摘要:

该研究调查了同性恋运动员在同性社会环境（全男性大学运动队）中与异性恋男性打交道时的共同信念、价值观和群体规范。它采用了同性恋运动员关于他们加入男性大学运动队和与异性恋男性成员相互关系的

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实际经历的叙述。该研究的目的是确定同性恋运动员在同性恋社交互动中的共同信念、价值观和群体规范，这反映在他们加入全男性大学团队的个人经历中。同样，本研究旨在基于对同性恋运动员在同性恋社会环境中与异性恋男性（全男性大学运动队）打交道的现实经验中的定性数据进行深入探索和主题分析，构建理论命题。分析基于从受访者的叙述中得出的三个主题：（一个）信念——群体对一个人在特定情况下应如何表现或行为的期望；（b）价值观——被认为是好的、可取的和正确的；（c）社会规范——体现人们对现实的看法的事件。该研究使用在线焦点小组讨论（脱硫）来收集和收集受访者的文化体验。这项研究可以很好地表达同性恋运动员的发言权，特别是他们在“大男子主义”社区中的社会文化角色，由于缺乏深入的研究，这些角色尚未完全传达给观众。此外，这项研究还为在全男性大学团队中提供同性恋运动员的叙述提供了一种途径，该团队旨在寻找一个新的概念维度来探索他们的信仰、价值观和规范，以反映真实的社会文化经历叙述在同性恋世界中。

关键词：民族志、同质社会性、同性恋运动员、同质社会文化、社会认同。

1. Introduction

The issue of gay men's membership of male collegiate sports teams, where the nature of the environment points toward the distinctive features of heterosexuality and masculinity, is still the subject of debate. According to some scholars who conducted research on masculinity in a fraternal system (Anderson, 2008), previous studies on masculine construction among men in male organizations consistently find that these men have due regard for the feelings, rights, and traditions of hegemonic culture. Consequently, scholars claim that the set of shared beliefs, values, and norms in the fraternal system has legitimized men's dominant position or hegemonic masculinity by way of a masculine peer culture that is racially exclusive, sexist, and highly homophobic. This context makes the research question of this study worth exploring and deserving of consideration.

The issue of how men, through their interactions with other men, maintain the concept of heterosexuality and masculinity, is a subject of discourse to this day. Studies have been conducted on 'bonds between men,' which have been documented in different contexts and perspectives, yet this topic is still considered an interesting and powerful subject to explore. The concept has been recurrently applied in most of the studies about men and masculinities, and it is used to structure, and in upholding and protecting, hegemonic masculinity. Bird (1996) explores the multiple conceptualizations of masculinities when it comes to the term 'sociality.' She uses this term to refer to 'nonsexual interpersonal attractions.' She elaborates that, during male homosocial heterosexual interactions, the concept of hegemonic masculinity is kept as a pattern for which men are held responsible, regardless of the individual concepts of masculinity that deviate from those of the upheld standards. She claims that, in the company of heterosexual men in homosocial circles, masculinity is supposed to convey the ideas of being emotionally detached and competitive, and of femininity as being of lesser importance.

There were two personal experiences the gay athletes encountered: 1) several sensed the necessity of embracing characteristics resting on masculine labels and avoided homosexual culture before coming out,

and 2) many received recognition and achieved inclusivity when coming out to teammates, which led to better performance (White et al., 2020). Homosociality among gay athletes on an all-male collegiate team can lead to homophobia, a fear among most men that they will be labeled as gays because they are seen as gender atypical. Anderson (2011) identified three variables for homophobia: "1) cultural awareness that homosexuality exists as a sexual orientation, 2) high levels of homophobia within a culture, and 3) the conflation of feminine behaviors in men with same-sex desire."

Flood (2008) emphasized the idea that male homosociality can indirectly convey the exercising of "men's interpersonal violence, a phenomenon that both expresses and maintains intergender and intragender hierarchies of power." Michael Kimmel (Flood, 2008, p. 341) claimed that men's actual application or use of gender has been conceived as a homosocial representation in which the process of carrying out the concept of manhood is directly taken from other men. He pointed out that men seek the approval of other men and attempt to raise their rankings in machismo culture by considering the "markers of manhood," such as wealth, power, status, physical prowess, and sexual and occupational achievement.

In exploring the answers to the research question, the researcher used two main lenses: social identity theory for realizing how individuals make sense of themselves and of the people in their social environment (Korte, 2007) and queer theory for querying the truth of the definitions of categories of gender and how it questions existing angles of investigation and develops new approaches (Schippert, 2011). This researcher also applied narrative theory, which closely studies sequences of events to determine how they differ from other types or styles of discourses, and how the narratives of what transpired among certain individuals in given situations with actual concerns can be significantly forceful (The Ohio State University, n.d.).

2. Research Question

The research question for this study, titled "The Ethnography of Homosociality Among Gay Athletes in

an All-Male Collegiate Team,” was as follows: what are the shared beliefs, values, and group norms of gay athletes in dealing with heterosexual males in a homosocial environment (all-male collegiate sports team)? Its focus was on understanding the values, beliefs, and group norms of gay athletes while socializing with all-male members of the sports team to which they belong. This question guided the researcher in exploring the daily lives of the respondents, in which the cultural meanings of the homosocial interactions of gay athletes with heterosexual co-members of an all-male sports team were ascertained and analyzed. Hammarén and Johansson (2014) defined homosociality as a form of social bonding among members of the same sex. This concept is often used and applied in studies relating to male friendship, male bonding, and fraternity orders. It centers on how men, through their associations and interactions with other men, protect and advocate patriarchy, which establishes how men bond, develop sealed teams, and defend their privileges and statuses. Jean Lipman-Bluman (Bird, 1996, p. 121) defined homosociality as the nonsexual attractions extended by men (or women) to members of their own sex.

3. Research Methods

This study used a focus group discussion (FGD) to compile the respondents' cultural experiences. The FGD used a team composed of three gay male members of collegiate sports teams with experience in homosocial interactions. The researcher considered a maximum of three respondents for this study. The FGD participants were selected through purposive sampling. The discussion themes, the participants' personalities, and their experiences with homosocial interactions were considered. The FGD was a scheduled activity based on all the participants' availability. The participants were provided with the group discussion's objectives, questions, and agenda to establish the structural discussions of the group. Prior to the FGD, invitations were sent to the selected participants. The FGD's objectives, questions, and agenda were sent to the participants. During the FGD, the participants were free to comment on the discussion topic, provide insight into it, and respond to the other participants.

The FGD topic was sensitive for the participants. Thus, they were uncomfortable sharing their experiences face-to-face with the other FGD members, and they suggested that the researcher conduct the discussion online. Other reasons for conducting the FGD online were geographical distance and the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, this research dealt with the respondents' personal lives, which, for ethical reasons, required keeping the identities of the respondents and the people around them confidential. It also meant ensuring that the organizations and situations they discussed remained confidential. Since this study could serve as research material that scholars, researchers, students, and others interested in LGBTQ issues could access, the researcher preferred not to

mention the respondents' real names and the names of the sports teams and their members who were directly mentioned in the personal narratives that the respondents recounted during the FGD.

The FGD was guided by the following main objectives: 1) to learn the shared beliefs, values, and group norms of the FGD participants through their recounting their personal experiences as gay men in a homosocial environment and 2) to relate those experiences with the other FGD participants and discuss them. The FGD was facilitated and moderated by the researcher, which was done last December 18, 2021, from 6 p.m. to 10:00 p.m via Zoom.

The data analysis used thematic analysis as a method of examining and interpreting the qualitative data. It was applied to the set of texts in the FGD transcripts. The researcher thoroughly examined the data to determine the common themes in terms of subjects, thoughts, and patterns of meaning that resulted from the narratives repeatedly.

4. Research Results and Discussions

The FGD extracts were analyzed point by point to fully elaborate on how they were constructed through a thematic analysis by determining the common themes in terms of subjects, thoughts, and patterns of meaning that resulted from the narratives repeatedly. The analyses of the respondents' narratives focused on the interpretations of their shared beliefs, values, and social norms as gay men in a male homosocial interaction.

The analyses were based on the three subjects derived from the respondents' narratives as follows: a) for belief, it answered the group expectations of how one should behave or act in a certain situation; b) for values, it responded to the situation of what was considered good, desirable, and correct; and c) for social norms, it answered to the event that embodied people's perception of reality. Based on the respondents' narratives, these subjects generated the initial codes that served as brief descriptions of what was being narrated in the FGD. From the codes, themes were constructed to interpret the codes. Themes were fully discussed according to the subjects from the main research question. The discussions were substantiated by presenting a matrix that displayed the connections between the FGD extract, codes, and themes (Table 1).

Table 1. Matrix of the FGD extracts with its codes and themes

FGD extract	Codes	Themes
<i>For belief</i> (Group expectations of how one should behave or act in a certain situation):	Father figure	Longing for a
	Must be manly	Sturdy Base
I was blessed with a father who could drive with his son's journey to achieve that extremely rare opportunity, to be admitted as a varsity and scholar wherein one situation could not even complete the needed meals a day.	Masculine in character.	
	Strong network	
	Bond, presence, and support	
	Strong touches	
My father is one of the proudest fathers who circulated the information to a neighborhood where his son is a varsity at a respectable academic institution in	Physical and mental support	

Metro Manila.

I empathized with the discouraging iron will of my mother towards my schooling in Metropolis. She was only concerned with the welfare of her son, specifically in a city common for social conflicts like criminalities, drug addictions, or prostitution these days. She was also looking after my sharp-witted future.

I found a network where I could release my isolation and meet my desire for shared interpersonal contact with people of distinct cultures within the sports environment.

I found new male friends for bonds, presence, and support, which were good enough to replace the isolation I was experiencing as a gay man at that moment.

I felt that something or someone was still missing from me, which I could not figure out. All I knew was that I needed people who could put strong touches on the unfinished puzzle in my character. I needed someone to increase the physicality and muscular connections to get to the top of my weak character. However, unfortunately, I spent too much time thinking about those all-male characters inside the rectangular court.

For values (What are considered good, desirable, and correct) It was a week-long physical and mental training. I was not accustomed to what would come out in the city's version of being a varsity on whom I decided to embark. All I knew was that there were physical pains to be inflicted on each rookie based on what I had learned at some stage of my childhood's team spirit with my buddies in my hometown. Intense physical training was no longer new in my vantage point since, during my younger years in the province, I, along with my playmates, used to reenact, as part of our youthful games, what we knew from our old siblings regarding sports.

My two brothers were also members of the community-based sports team in our community. I, together with my childhood friends, covertly witnessed how the sports brotherhood was carried out in our small community. Physical tests and harm were imposed on the players to be admitted as certified sports team members. However, those were kinds of stuff from the remote culture of our locality, situated far off from the city's means of living. My action was not in harmony with the way my feeling was genuinely expressed, mannish by deed but feminine by emotional state, but I considered what was good for my sports career.

I saw all the male members, who were already waiting inside the gym. Since it was a practice with a strong physicality, their characters seemed uncaring and looked as if

they were ready to stamp me with blemishes on my face, but I stood in my right mood.

Every glimpse I made at those heterosexual male members of the team, my homosexual tendencies and strong feeling for men were revitalized and started to scream to let them out of that cubbyhole. However, I considered the good purpose why I was there.

For social norms (What embodies people's perception of reality) As a varsity player, I geared up for any interfering kinds of stuff to happen on the first day of our training and was already in my jeans, shirt, and rubber shoes, with my backpack at my shoulder. I could sense the agony while waiting for the other varsity members to pick me up from my dormitory.

I spent too much time thinking about myself, who then walled with an average body type, a frail personality, and a woman-like feeling. With those characters, I felt not well-suited to a sports team system's physicality and rock-hard culture.

I was afraid of being persecuted, mentally threatened, and emotionally discriminated against by the people around me, which is how I covered up myself. Of course, I was deprived of my sense of self then, but I had to follow the norms of what a conformist type of environment was trying to dictate. I supposed that everything would be solely devoted to my sports activities. However, then again, I was wrong. Due to its 'macho' culture and acquaintances, my homosexual tendencies and admiration for men turned into a greater shape than before, but I controlled my feelings to avoid some punishments.

Quick-thinking
Clever in decision-making
Mentally alert
Fear of punishment
Avoiding persecution and discrimination

Embracing the
Shadow of
Uncertainty

Sports only for real and Facing the
straight men Challenge of
Strong mind, strong 'Machismo'
body
Determination and
willpower
Visions and sacrifices
Willingness to fight
Right purpose

The matrix shows comments from a focus group discussion (FGD). These include (1) narratives from gay athletes based on their shared beliefs, values, and social norms while socializing with the other members of their male sports teams; (2) codes (the phrases or sentences that highlight segments from the narratives of the respondents); and (3) themes (patterns that capture the vital and interesting ideas about the research question). Based on the table, the FGD responses were separated according to the main research questions, which focused on knowing and understanding the values, beliefs, and group norms of gay athletes while socializing with the other male members of their sports teams. This study defined "homosociality" as the socialization or social bonds among members of the same sex.

Column 1 of the matrix was divided into the main contexts of the research questions. The first one—belief—refers to group expectations of how the respondents should behave or act in a certain situation. This cultural concept identified similar codes from the respondents' narratives that pertained to the context of

belief as a prerequisite to the sustainability of their athletic hope and vision. These beliefs were laid adjacent to the prevailing characteristics of male traits in protecting hegemonic masculinity. Examples include father figure; masculine in character; strong network; strong bond, presence, and support; and strong touches with physical and mental support. These common codes were translated into themes or patterns that captured vital and interesting ideas about the “longing for a sturdy base.” This theme summarized the idea that a gay athlete must develop the belief that to be an athlete, he needs a strong upbringing that supports the traditional expectations of masculinity in terms of behavior and attitude.

Values, as the second vital context of the research question, refers to what is considered good, desirable, and correct. This cultural concept reveals similar codes from the respondents’ narratives concerning the standards by which gay athletes define their purpose in the homosocial environment. These include ideas like “sports is only for straight men;” “strong mind, strong body;” “determination and willpower;” “sacrifices;” “willingness to fight;” and “the right purpose.” These common codes from the respondents’ narratives were converted into themes or patterns that describe the values required for the athlete to project the idea of “machismo.” This theme summarizes the idea that a gay athlete must develop the value that to become an athlete, he needs a hard and challenging tryout to test his unwavering character.

Finally, the context of social norms pertains to situations that embody the respondents’ perceptions of reality. This cultural concept was able to determine some similar codes from the respondents’ narratives that signified the conformity on the gay athletes’ expectations of how they should behave like quick-thinking, clever in decision-making, mentally alert, fear of punishment, and avoiding persecution and discrimination. These common codes from the constructs of the respondents’ narratives were translated to a theme or pattern that explained the central ideas about the social norm, and that was ‘embracing the shadow of uncertainty.’ This theme summarized the idea that a gay athlete must develop a norm that, being an athlete, he needs to develop an idea in his mind stipulating what he must achieve and resolve under certain circumstances.

Based on the in-depth exploration and thematic analysis of the qualitative data taken from the real-world experiences of gay athletes in dealing with heterosexual males in a homosocial environment (all-male collegiate sports team), the following theoretical propositions were established:

1. A gay athlete must develop a belief that, being an athlete, he needs a strong upbringing that supports the attributes of the traditional expectations of masculinity in terms of behavior and attitude.
2. A gay athlete must develop a value that, being an athlete, he needs hard and challenging tryouts to test his unwavering character.

3. A gay athlete must develop a norm that, as an athlete, he needs to develop an idea in his mind stipulating what he must achieve and resolve under certain circumstances.

5. Conclusion

The LGBTQ culture is rich in experiences, customs, and socio-cultural stories. These components are essential if they will be delivered accurately to the people without misrepresenting the meanings and concepts. The argument on how gays, through their interactions with other straight men in a homosocial culture, affect their gay character representation is still a controversial subject of oral and written exchange of sentiments. There were studies conducted on ‘bonds between men’ and recorded in different research contexts and perspectives. Nevertheless, this topic is still regarded as a strong focus of the investigation to dig into. This study serves as a framework in establishing the grounds on how gays deal with straight men in a homosocial interaction through a comprehensive presentation and analysis of a real narrative from the respondents in joining a longstanding inclusive form of ‘macho’ culture like in an all-male collegiate sports team. With these, a thorough and all-inclusive study on the gays’ interactions with the all-male members of a homosocial group must be considered and explored profoundly.

This study focused on the three selected gay athletes from the collegiate sports teams who had experiences in homosocial interactions. Therefore, the researcher considered a maximum of three respondents for this study. The participants were selected through purposive sampling, where the discussion theme, the participants’ characteristics and experiences with homosocial interactions were considered. Since the topic was sensitive enough to deal with the selected FGD gay participants, the researcher used an online method to conduct the discussion. This was also upon the suggestion of the participants because they were not comfortable enough to share their gay experiences with the other FGD members via a face-to-face approach.

The study established the following theoretical propositions: (1) Gay athlete must develop a belief that being an athlete, he needs a strong upbringing that supports the attributes of the traditional expectations of masculinity in terms of behavior and attitude; (2) Gay athlete must develop a value that being an athlete, he needs hard and challenging tryout to test his unwavering character; and (3) Gay athlete must develop a norm that being an athlete, he needs to develop an idea in the minds stipulating what he must achieve and resolve under certain circumstances.

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