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Manning up and Staying Buff: Expanding the Embodiment of Masculinity among Filipino Spornosexual Men

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Abstract

The perception and portrayal of masculinity has morphed over time, leading to a modern classification of man, the Spornosexuals. Through a phenomenological research design, the lived experiences among Spornosexuals residing in the rural province of Southern Leyte, Philippines, were explored, with emphasis on the challenges and rewards upon their embodiment of masculinity, and the struggles they encountered in developing their ideal muscular physique. The coping mechanism exhibited by these individuals in handling the struggles they encountered in their day-to-day lives were uncovered. Their personification of masculinity is under the theory of Social Constructionism. A face-to-face, a semi-structured interview was employed to gather meaningful responses that were analyzed through Colaizzi's (1978) strategy. It was evident that despite the negative experiences they encountered upon reconstructing their physicality and expressing their masculinity, the rewards they gained, accompanied with their forward-looking motivations, continue to ignite their momentum in owning and expressing who they are. In general, Spornosexuals are unique individuals who need to be understood and embraced just like any other member of the society.

Keywords: Spornosexuals, Masculinity, Social Constructionism, Muscular Physique, Phenomenological Analysis, Southern Leyte, Philippines, Asia

Introduction

Rationale of the Study

Men have been considered a prime member of our society and are ought to obtain ideal attributes and essentialities in order to maintain its symbol and image of what a man is, and how a man should look like in their everyday lives. Our definition and characterization of a man has morphed through time and continues to evolve relative to what is being imposed in our society (Francis, 2015). Masculinity is greatly influenced and is shapeshifted primarily by culture and society which men live and interact. Through the history of mankind, masculinity has been fabricated practically around the concept that men are wage-earners, defenders, strong, and responsible in the family.

In this day and age, together with the escalation of neologism, our ideology of manhood, with its attributes, has now evolved to a whole new perspective uncovering a new variation of what a man is. Men who are imbued with

a good physique, toned, and sculpted muscular built have paved a greater value of attractiveness and higher appeal in today's society. This newly-established social barometer of masculinity gave birth to a modern-day man which was termed as spornosexuals. Simpson (2014) coined spornosexuality as lads who aspired to have a pumped and chiseled body as depicted from idyllic men found in magazines, social media, commercials, sports, and even in pornography by lending ample amount of resources and time in the gym. Additionally, they take pride in their developed body by showcasing it through direct social interaction with others and by parading it in their social media platforms (Hakim, 2015). These men believe that having a fit body is more desirable in terms of showcasing one's body rather than wearing accessories and fashionable clothes.

In the Philippine setting, our understanding of these individuals and their way of living seems to be minuscule. Introduction of such new-fangled terminology in our consciousness transpired through a featured report in national TV news anchored by Jessica Soho four years ago showing identified Filipino spornosexuals in conjunction to their distinctiveness as well as the misconceptions they received from the people in our society as it collides with our definition of what a typical Filipino man should act and look like thus hindering their self-expression about who they are (Bangeles, Serentas, Tik-ing, & Tarusan, 2015). This social impediment befalls due to people's lack of familiarity and understanding about their nature as a prevailing member of our society.

The hindrance of expressing and owning who they are and how they think they should be perceived in our society resulted in the reluctance of their emergence. In the province of Southern Leyte, Philippines, there have been no recognized spornosexuals nor researches conducted pertaining to spornosexuals and their nature resulting in the existence of gaps as little is understood about them, the spornosexuals. Consequently, these individuals need to be respected and accepted as a prevailing member of our modern society, which can be achieved through a comprehensive inquiry and boosting societal awareness relative to their (spornosexuals) attitudes.

Considering the existence of this another classification of a contemporary man, the researcher was opted to dive in the lived experiences of spornosexuals with a focus on the existence of these individuals coming from the selected municipalities of Southern Leyte. Particularly, this research was driven to examine the impact of being a spornosexual, their definition of masculinity, and how being such affects their day-to-day. Further, this study determines the struggles they experienced in the process of developing and maintaining their ideal physique. The coping mechanism exhibited by these individuals in handling the struggles they encountered in their day-to-day lives were uncovered. This research, as a whole, aims for better understanding and facilitate social acceptance for these individuals.

Review of Related Literature

As with the barometer of what a man is with its essentialities, how the society discerns masculinity through time has fostered with the ideology of male dominance and is predominantly crafted by the culture and society (Ceballos, 2013; Stergiou-Kita, LaFrance, Pritlove & Power, 2017; MacKenzie, & Foster, 2017). Before the unveiling of these newly-termed lads, metrosexuals, straight-identified men who have heightened aesthetics and a fashionable sense that is linked with increased femininity and somewhat associated with homosexuality were dominant (Mitchell & Lodhia, 2017). However, metrosexuals died as men continue to morph in the past decade from the existence of lumbersexuals, mandrogenous men, to the body-obsessed men, which are called spornosexuals (Francis, 2015). This meytamorphosis of men's portrayed masculinity simply shows that the depiction of masculinity changes and evolves through time bearing in mind its portrayal, nature, and how the member of society perceived them.

Simpson (2014) further defines these men as people who aim to attain and maintain a meticulously pumped and chiseled physic as well as having muscle-enhancing tattoos, well-styled beard, and pierced bodies. Spornosexuals uses their body as the ultimate accessories in this contemporary society, and they consume an ample amount of time fashioning and developing it at the gym (Hakim, 2015). In this newly developed terminology and

classification of a modern man, spornosexual shares inert characteristics that are unique to these people and are distinguishable from other sub-classification of men.

The rise of these individuals having a distinctive behavior is being driven with various forces which can be elucidated in the theory of social constructionism. This theory explicates an individual with their gradual manifestation and formed through the result of cultural influence and exposure to various societal factors such as language and socialization (Edwards, 2015; Cheryan, Cameron, Katagiri & Monin, 2015; 2018; Galbin, 2014). This is coherent with the embodiment of masculinity/femininity (Ashraf, 2018), and gender expression and lifestyle (Vogl & Baur, 2018). The norms and shared behavior to a common group serve as a driving force in changing an individual's behaviors to be aligned or to be one with the group members in order to evade conflict and maintain harmonious relationship (Bangeles et al., 2015).

The postmodernist view of this theory indicates how a society with its milieu influenced the views of individual about reality through socialization. Social media and various commercial ads platforms influenced the sprout of spornosexuals (Simpsons, 2014) as media plays a vital role in the portrayal of an individual's various description of masculinity (Yu, 2010). In the advent of social media, men are highly predisposed on how they should look like which resulted to, objectification as well as a positive and negative social comparison which led to body modification (Arya & Rai, 2017; Norton, 2017).

Spornosexuals gain self-esteem and connections to people by posting their body on different social media platforms, thus motivating them in fostering their individuality (Wisetsri, 2017; Hirramoto & Lai, 2017). Asian News Monitor (2014) explicated how images and portrayals of what is "sexy," in the agreement of having a muscular built in the different platforms such as in social media and pornography geared the younger generation to be obsessed in developing their body. As observed in western countries, economic condition and stability of a country greatly inclined towards the manifestation of spornosexuals as an upshot of austerity and economic oppression as lads seek value by reconstructing their body and using it to elevate themselves (Jaime, 2018; Phil's Stock World, 2016). This scenario drove men to be physically appealing and to have a more superior physique in order to gain better job opportunities and higher rewards (Sierminska, 2015). Furthermore, in accordance to the concurrent society, these men engaged in re-shaping their body as a means of rendering oneself legible to fit in the up-to-date culture and trend (Winter, 2015).

Filipinos have a different view of what is perceived to be an ideal man and what he should look like in a Filipino context. Filipino men who are physically attractive or good looking are considered to be a prime preference as an ideal partner as Filipino associates them with having better job opportunities and having a healthier body with a lesser chance of having an illness (Bernarte, Jalandra, Jarquio, & Sanggo, 2016). Additionally, Filipino characterization of what a man is, with the concept of "machismo," is highly influenced by the western view due to media exposure and the domination of internet (Cañete, 2015).

However, in the context of the Filipino culture and milieu, spornosexuals are less explored leaving an unexplored angle for these individuals. Filipinos uphold the conservative ideology of how a Filipino should act like (Alexander, 2014) which contradicts with the nature and behavior of spornosexuals. Relative to the preponderance of existing empirical studies about the spornosexuals, this study aimed to answer the following research questions; (a) what were experiences encountered by spornosexuals upon their embodiment of masculinity?; (b) what are the struggles they encountered in developing their ideal muscular physique?; and, (c) how do these spornosexuals cope up with the challenges they experienced in their day-to-day lives?.

Methodology

Research Design

This investigation employed a phenomenological research design as it has the capability to study people's experience, how people construct meaning in their lives, and commonalities which transverse individuals

experiencing a specific phenomenon (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). Particularly, this study utilized Transcendental phenomenology which aimed to seek understanding in human experience which is performed by laying aside prepossessed ideas in order to view the phenomena to be investigated through a new lens allowing it to immerse giving its distinct meaning and form (Moustakas, 2004). Additionally, this particular approach of phenomenology allowed the researcher is to gain an understanding of the participant's subjective significance of their everyday lived experience (Heindel, 2014). This qualitative design enabled me to expand the embodiment of masculinity among spornosexual with the aim to capture their live experiences in their manifestation and reconstructing their body towards their ideal physique.

Research Setting

This qualitative study was conducted in the Philippines, particularly in the province of Southern Leyte, where the focus participants were residing.

Sampling

The focus participants of this investigation were five self-identified spornosexual men with age ranges from 21-29 years old and came from different walks life from an undergraduate student to participants working in white-colored jobs such as in education and in business who were selected through purposive sampling. This phenomenological study selected 5 participants that fit the suggestion of Creswell (2013) as an ample number of participants to generate meaningful themes and useful interpretations. To strengthen the selection of participants, I conducted a preliminary interview which aimed to verify if the selected participants are indeed spornosexuals based on the criteria taken form Simpons (2015).

Data Collection

After selecting the five focus participants, the semi-structured interview was conducted. I subjected the instrument for validation to an expert and was pilot tested to a sample participant who shared the same demographics to the target participants in order to bolster the quality of the instrument used. The said instrument contained questions that are open-ended in nature and enabled the researcher to unveil the lived experiences among spornosexual. The interviews were carried out one-by-one, and their responses were recorded using an audio-recorder that usually lasted from 15 to 20 minutes. The verbatim transcriptions of the audio recordings were done after the interview. The verbatim transcriptions were translated into the English language and were peer-reviewed by an English critic.

To impose the confirmability aspect of the study, I carried it out by maintaining accurate written notes, and by persistently checking and rechecking the data. Moreover, through the use of bracketing with its application in phenomenology, personal biases were minimized to examine the data from a new and different perspective as guided the suggested techniques taken from Chan (2013).

Data Analysis

The gathered data were analyzed using Collaizzi's Method (1978) with detailed steps as cited by Abu Shosha (2012) which were the carried out by organizing the gathered qualitative data from the interviews into categories on the basis of themes, patterns, concepts, or similar features.

Relative to the data analysis used, member checking was employed in the form of focused group discussion to verify if the generated themes and structure of the phenomenon captured the feelings and life experiences of the participants establishing data credibility. Additionally, for dependability, the audit log was utilized elucidating the procedures used in data collection and analysis (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004).

Ethical Considerations

The protection of the participants is the prime responsibility of the researcher as human subjects were used in this study. I performed the collection of data following a systematic procedure that encompassed securing permission to the conduct of the study to the participants by sending them the letter of permission, and orally-recorded agreement to allow me in gathering the vital data for this investigation. These selected individuals were told that participating in the study was voluntary, and the purpose and procedures of the study were explained to them. The collected data in this study were kept confidential to protect the identity of participants. I also asked for the guidance and permission of my professor in Qualitative Research from the University where I'm undertaking my doctorate degree in Social Science Research to screen my manuscript if it's ready and imbued with the necessary ethical considerations to proceed for the data gathering procedure.

Researcher's Reflexivity

I identify myself as someone who also regularly workouts with the intention to achieve a toned body. Though I classify myself as a homosexual man which removes me on the demographics of being classified as spornosexual as these men are heterosexual in nature, my experiences as someone who also re-shapes body may interfere to the everyday experiences of the spornosexuals with how I gathered and analyzed the data. To enforced reflexivity relative to my situation, I performed member checking as I went back to the participants again to verify the transcribe statements if it was the one being shared during the interviews, and after the data analysis where the significant themes where generated if it really captured their experiences as spornosexuals.

Results

The results were grounded in 4 major themes: (a) Challenges expressing their masculinity, (b) Recompense of being a Spornosexual, (c) Struggles in Achieving and Maintaining their Muscular Physique and (d) Resiliency of being a Spornosexual. The following themes are represented with sample significant statements (SS) taken from the five participants (P). The major themes were combined synthesizing the structure of the phenomenon.

Challenges in Expressing their Masculinity

The embodiment and expression of their masculinity in different avenue have gone through leaps and bounds as they experienced different challenges. A spornosexual in nature commonly showcases his masculinity by posting half-naked photos in different social media platforms such in Facebook and Instagram. This, however, resulted in the upsurge of an overwhelming affection and attention from people that exasperated them as they shared that:

"I usually received numerous private messages every time I post topless photos on my day or in my status—it irritates me" [P4][SS37]

"I received a lot of private messages and attention from Bisexuals and gay men as well as the girls. And it can be overbearing at times." [P5][SS13]

Moreover, this overwhelming affection they received from people resulted in an unstable relationship as their partners misconstrued them as being not loyal and entertains others despite them being in a relationship with someone. Participants shared their struggle in having and sustaining a relationship with a person as they shared that:

"My girlfriend would become jealous and is doubtful of my loyalty as I received a lot of notifications and comments from girls online" [P5][SS48]

"Woman does not like it because it gives them the idea that I'm an untrustworthy person"[P3][SS25].

Gaining positive attention and affection from people due to having a muscular built is a positive thing, but receiving numerous private messages, comments, and pokes from girls, bisexuals and gays can be annoying to them. Additionally, the affection they gained from people resulted in relationship doubt as they question their security and loyalty to their partner. It also affects them in finding a prospective partner as they are being judged as a womanizer and untrustworthy. These scenarios show how people perceived their image and portrayal of masculinity as highly attractive, and in some angles, impacted them negatively.

As these individuals openly showcase their half-naked muscular body in different avenues, being judged as a highly-sexual or promiscuous was experienced by these individuals as they mentioned that:

"Because of my muscular body, they thought I am a sexually aggressive person, and my libido is always high." [P3][SS16]

Additionally, relative to their expression of masculinity, the identification of these individuals as someone who sells sex as a way of earning money is a common prejudice as people as they shared that:

"I get to be misidentified as a "call boy," particularly to the people of the gay community because of my built." [P5][SS46]

These views and perception of having a muscular body simply show how people superficially associates sex based on the physical image of an individual. Having a perceived "sexy" body and openly expressing it to the public is stereotypically misidentified as someone who is sexually aggressive and offers sex in exchange for a pay transpired to the Filipino conservative view of sex and maintaining an image imbued with high morale and dignity is important.

Experiencing forms of unsolicited sexual touching or locally known as "tsansing" from the people they interact with is one of the unfortunate circumstances these people experienced. They shared:

"I experienced being touched in public in my chest and abdominal parts, and I don't like it because it is disrespectful." [P3][SS26]

As these individuals usually wear body-accentuating clothing like fitted t-shirts with plunging necklines and slim fit jeans accompanied with their open expression of their body in the social media platforms, experiencing sexually-related unsolicited touching to gain sorts of sexual favor or gratification is a likely behavior from the people they interact. This is in relation to how the society views them as they are considered be a "masturbatory aid" due to their attractive physical attributes (Simpsons, 2014).

It is evident that spornosexuals, upon the embodiment and expression of their masculinity in the different avenues resulted in several challenges which they experienced and negatively affecting some aspects of their daily lives. Prejudice, stereotyping, and lack of understanding about who they were the prime causes on how the society negatively views them. Bolstering societal awareness, gaining public support would greatly improve the way society perceives and treats them (Cherry, 2018).

Recompense of being a Spornosexual

The appreciation they gained by being physically attractive is a triumph being considered by them as they shared:

"There a more people who liked me because of my good-shaped body" [P4][SS38].

This triumph, as being physically attractive by means of having a muscular built also revealed to be a leading, motivating factor for them to reconstruct their body as they shared that:

"My motivation why I'm doing this is to look attractive and to look better" [P2][SS17].

The being physically attractive based from the positive response they received from people corroborates their development, thus improving the way they perceived themselves. Boosting their self-esteem by being a better version of themselves is one of the rewards they gained from embodying and expressing their masculinity. They became more confident with who they are as they from the positive response from people as they mentioned that:

"I gained more appreciation in my own body as I find it sexy the same with how people around me perceived it" [P5][SS49].

The responses also show how overcoming insecurities and improving their physical appearance drives them to develop their body as they shared:

"I grew up with a lot of insecurities and having a good built made me feel better as I received compliments from people" [P4][SS41].

Their self-perceived development and the validation they received from people whom they interact with in relation to the attainment of their ideal physic enhances their confidence and improves their self-esteem.

As they become a better image of themselves, this in return motivates others to work out as well with an aim for a fit and healthy body. They consider it as a reward as they shared:

"In my case, there are comments of appreciation from my facebook friends, and I get to influence them to work out. In fact, there were females who asked me about my routines and diet" [P2][SS20].

This reward also motivates them to improve further and maintain the body that they as they shared:

"Inspiring others to workout also pushes me to do well in my workout and maintaining my target body" [P3][SS29].

Aside from the appreciation, they gained in attaining a good physique, being a good exemplary to others in pursuing a healthier lifestyle continues to drive these individuals to maintain their ideal muscular physique.

Embodying their definition of masculinity was able to give them circumstances of triumphs. This simply implies that being a spornosexual is more than just having a good and an aesthetically pleasing body as portrayed by their well-defined muscular physique. Attainment of their ideal physique accompanied with the validation from people improves their self-esteem, thus pushing them more to further foster and maintain the body that they have. Moreover, being a model of aspiration to others in having a healthier lifestyle boosts their morale and self-appreciation knowing that what they are doing is also motivating other people.

Struggles in achieving and maintaining their Muscular physique

With the eminent nature of spornosexuals in molding their body and utilizing it to fashion themselves, the process of reconstructing their natural form and transforming it to their ideal chiseled body is more than just the act of going to the gym as they experienced challenges. Proper time-management is one of the struggles they encountered in developing and maintaining their muscular physique as they shared that:

"Time-management and scheduling of my workout is a struggle since I'm working from 8:00 to 5:00, which forces me to work out during night time, which is very exhausting. Sometimes, I have to skip and under time from my work just to compensate my need to work out" [P3][SS44].

This only shows that they spend a considerable amount of time in the fitness gym, which resulted to time-management ordeals as it competes with their work and other daily activities.

As they subject their body to highly rigorous activities to build their muscles, these people constantly experienced intense muscle pains or delayed-onset muscle soreness (DOMS) as their muscles repair itself after exposing it to an extraneous muscle-building routine (Ingraham, 2018). They shared that:

“The pain that I experienced was a struggle when I started working out—It affected my daily activities”[2][SS8].

This struggle affected some of their daily activities because of the muscles soreness they experienced after their workout routines. Muscle-building exercises usually involve heavier weights to be added in different workout equipment which pushes their body to their limits attaining the development they sought.

Developing their body also entails them to be familiarized with the specific routines for them to undertake in order to achieve the ideal results. However, executing it was a challenge among spornosexuals, especially during the earlier stages of their development as they aired:

“The lack of knowledge about the proper routines and its execution exercise programs and proper diet to be undertaken were my struggles when I first started working out.”[P3][SS34]

For them to target the desired muscle groups to developed, they need to be oriented with the quintessential routines accompanied by various apparatuses and strict diet plan to gain the looked-for outcomes. These require them to hire a gym instructor to assist them, thereby entail additional expenses. Additionally, to enhance the efficiency of their routines, taking up muscle-building supplements (whey protein powder and capsule) are an important part of their development. On the other hand, spornosexuals experienced irregular supply of these important supplements due to its unavailability as well as its high cost considering that Southern Leyte is a province and access to these resources are scarce.

Owning their definition of masculinity is rooted in the biological aspect of developing and shaping their body. Achieving and maintaining the body that they have was not an easy feat for spornosexuals as they experienced a lot of challenges in terms of their bodily limitations and lack of resources needed. This simply shows how persistent and determined these individuals are in achieving there sought after body which goes beyond their physical appearance of what a typical spornosexual should look like.

Resiliency of being a Spornosexual

Despite the hurdles they experienced both in the social perspective and in the process of reconstructing their body, they were able to sustain their image and continue to reconstruct their body to their ideal portrayal of masculinity. Maintaining mental fortitude is one of the ways in ignoring the negative responses they received from people as they shared that:

“I ignored what people say about me because I know that it is not true, and it may influence me negatively.”[SS45][P1]

They also shared that instilling a good motivating factor enabled them to push through the different struggles they encountered. They mentioned that:

“Being a good inspiration to others and having friends who also share the same objectives pushes me to work out more and having the desired body” [SS41][P3].

As they experienced various struggles, coping with these different challenges in order for them to maintain focus in developing their body and to continue to express their definition of what a man is important. This is important to keep them on track towards achieving their looked-for physique and how they want to be perceived to the people around them.

Emerging Theme: Synthesis of the Phenomenon

After arriving at the themes, a structure of the phenomenon was extracted, which shows that spornosexuals experienced both rewarding and challenging outcomes upon their embodiment of masculinity. Their individual experiences played an important role in providing fuel for motivation in reconstructing their physicality towards becoming a spornosexual (Bangeles et al., 2015). Even if they had good motivations and drives in reconstructing their physical appearance together with its expression, they still experienced unfavorable circumstance which affects them negatively. The challenges they experienced went beyond with their interaction with people in different avenues, the process of shaping and maintaining their physique pushed their body to their limits, which resulted in the different unfavorable circumstances. Regardless of these challenges, the triumphs they were able to experience accompanied their coping mechanisms of becoming a resilient individual continue to motivate these individuals in maintaining and conveying their definition of what a man is.

Conclusion

This investigation expanded the life of spornosexuals and was able to uncover a glimpse of their life. In social perspective, as they manifest their definition of what a man is which is characterized by having a muscular and fit body complemented with body-extenuating clothing, tattoos, piercing, and beard, they experienced negative encounters as they interact with people in the society in different avenues (e.g. social media platforms). People's lack of understating towards their behavior as a spornosexuals resulted in prejudiced, misconceptions, and negative associations towards who they are, which deleteriously affected their personal well-being and their good relations to people around them. In terms of rebuilding their physical appearance, achieving and sustaining their ideal physique are not an easy feat in performing their necessary regimen as this requires ample time allocation, knowledge in proper routine execution, proper dietary meal plan, and quintessential source of muscle-building supplements. Despite those struggles, they also gained positive rewards since reconstructing their image boosted their self-esteem as they gained affection and validation from people relative to their progress of them being physically pleasing and being a better version of themselves. Coping mechanisms were exhibited by these individuals, which empowered them in preserving their identity and characterization as a spornosexual amidst negative experiences and remarks from others.

Recommendations

The salient findings of this study resulted in the following recommendations. Educating people and making them aware of their nature is vital for them to be treated equally with equal respect just like any other members in our society. Family members, friends and people who get to intermingle with these individuals should understand their behavior incoherent to their ways of expressing their masculinity and be enlightened with their day-to-day routines and diet plans in order to interact with them appropriately relative to their nature.

This study can also give light for other spornosexuals on how to handle challenges they might encounter by fostering and modeling the coping mechanisms exhibited by the focus participants which enabled the latter to sustain their nature of being a spornosexual and to be continuously motivated them to own their characterization of masculinity.

Fitness gym establishments could impose a more flexible time frame of schedule for these lads to work out. As most of them are working on day jobs, accompanied with their household obligations, having more extended time in the evening would be more convenient and would greatly allow these individuals to follow their ideal workout

routines without compromising their quality time spent in their respective job and good relation to people around them.

In the light of the future researchers, considering that spornosexuals in the context of the Filipino culture is less-explored and researches relative to these individuals are minuscule, further examination about these individuals are crucial in order understand their behavior. They may study the impact of them being a spornosexuals in their workplace. Expanding the dynamics of how the people around them (e.g. family, friends and workmates) interacts with them and being impacted considering their unique behavior is also worth exploring.

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