

Chapter 18

Filipino Cyborg Sexualities, Chatroom Masculinities, Self-Ascribed Identities, Ephemeral Selves

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ABSTRACT

This cyberethnographic study aims to describe the creation of male sexualities among self-ascribed Filipino men in online chatrooms, describe the virtual environments wherein cyber male sexualities are constructed, and discuss the extent to which virtual male sexualities reflect contemporary physical world male sexualities and implicate masculinities. Chatroom selves are self-ascribed and ephemeral selves that abound in an indulgent ambiance. Chatrooms sanction a whole range of behaviors that afford meaningfully lived freedom to persons. The author argues that under similar conditions, the practice of masculinities can become non-oppressive, egalitarian, and liberating for the self and for others.

INTRODUCTION

While we frequently hear assertions for egalitarian gender relations from the women's point of view, male discourses around concrete responses to strategic gender needs to eventually achieve gender justice are very hard to come by. Considering that men in contemporary times greatly contribute to the reproduction and maintenance of a patriarchal culture, it makes great sense to examine contemporary masculinities, or the many

social constructions of what it means to be a man, (Flood, 1995) if only to open a venue for us to think out how men can possibly act to undermine patriarchy. (Kulkarni, 2001)

Quite a few empirical data have demonstrated the intimate relationship of men's sexualities and the socially constructed masculinities. Men often think about their sexualities in terms of gender. (Kimmel and Messner, 1995) Sexual incompetence is usually regarded by men as a threat to masculinity (Fracher and Kimmel, 1995) and

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often causes humiliation and despair, (Tiefer n.d., as cited by Flood, 1995) while sexual prowess is deemed as proof of masculinity and induces a sense of personal fulfillment. Notions of masculinities, in turn, inform and shape men's experiences of their sexualities. (Fracher and Kimmel, 1995) Regardless of sexual orientation, men live through their sexualities as experiences of their particular gender. (Kimmel and Messner, 1995) Power and the hegemonic concepts of domination permeate men's behaviors around sexualities. While it can be argued that this contemporary relationship between male sexualities and masculinities is itself a social construction, and can be traced back to the development of patriarchy itself, it should precisely be because of this channel that we shall be looking at male sexualities, in order to take a good glance at masculinities.

Online chatrooms are "places" in cyberspace that afford different ways of creating and expressing identities and sexualities. (Castañeda, 2005) These virtual places provide a good illustration of "how use of information technologies has modified how human beings relate to one another and to their environment." (Couch, 1996) People inside chatrooms take up usernames, which can be pseudonymous, and communicate through languages encoded as texts. The pseudonymity that chatrooms afford reminds us of the "secrecy," which is an important part in men's "sexuality script." (Fracher and Kimmel, 1995) A place that maintains one's identity as secret is a place where men want to talk about sex or express their sexualities.

This present study aims to 1. describe the creation of male sexualities among self-ascribed Filipino men in online chatrooms; 2. describe the virtual environments wherein cyber male sexualities are constructed; 3. and discuss the extent to which virtual male sexualities reflect contemporary physical world male sexualities and implicate gender relations.

A study on Filipino male sexualities in cyberspace will help us understand men in the context

of a reality that is unmindful of social categories, such as gender and class – which potentially limit behavior – and wherein identity is largely a matter of self-attribution. By looking at a culture that demonstrates both liberation and potential domination, this study adds a new dimension to notions of power and agency in gender studies. This undertaking also hopes to contribute to the much-needed discourse on masculinities and enhance the potential for the discourse to bring about egalitarian gender relations.

METHODOLOGY

Crafting the methodology for this research has not been easy, especially because of this relatively new approach to knowledge production within a relatively new "research locale." The metaphorical place called cyberspace only partly – if at all – shares the features of a physical research venue, making it difficult for me to extrapolate technical and ethical principles from physical ethnography to this present work. Rather than decide on overarching ethical principles, especially as regards obtaining informed consent and ensuring anonymity, I approached the ethical considerations of data gathering and data handling techniques contextually. The proposal I wrote for this research was reviewed and approved by the Ateneo de Davao University Research Ethics Committee.

The research drew on cyberethnographic methods of knowledge production. (Mason, 1999; Gajjala, 2000) For over two years, I went to chatrooms in the Yahoo chat system as participant observer. I chatted with chatroom goers who spoke Filipino (the official and most widely used language in the Philippines) or Bisaya (second most widely used language in the Philippines) and who self-identified as males. I chatted with participants either in public chatrooms or in private rooms (also called instant messaging or IM rooms). While in public chatrooms though, I was silent most of the time while actively paying

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