

THE COVERT SUBCULTURE OF MALE HOMOSEXUAL PROSTITUTES IN METRO-MANILA

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Few studies have been pursued concerning male homosexual prostitution in the Philippines and elsewhere. It is thus the aim of the paper to explore the so-called "call boy" subculture within metropolitan Manila and to render a substantial general description to that effect. It is assumed that it occurs in clandestine and covert operation. The combination of two research techniques, namely, the *pakikisama* method and the depth-interview served as the approach to the present problem. Only six call boys (male homosexual prostitutes) from a brothel-gaybar located somewhere in Sampaloc area within the periphery of the University Belt formally participated in the study. The author further discusses the general characteristics of their subculture. An elaboration of the findings of this investigation is discussed.

Prostitution has been defined by Coleman (1972) as the provision of sexual relations in return for money. In addition, he technically categorized prostitution into four general types, namely: female heterosexual prostitution, male heterosexual prostitution, female homosexual prostitution, and male homosexual prostitution. The present study does not aim to discuss all of them. It focuses solely on the fourth type - prostitution involving homosexual relations for which the male is paid - particularly within the Philippine social and cultural context.

There seems to be too much unintentional biasing of previous studies related to prostitution as manifested by the flooding of research materials concerning the female heterosexual variety. Enough data have been recorded to facilitate understanding of this most common type of prostitution. But there is an inadequacy of data as far as the other three types are concerned. The existing body of knowledge about the matter is therefore unfortunately incomplete. In order to help rectify this neglect, the present research attempts to tackle another type, as mentioned beforehand, the male homosexual prostitution.

Contrary to impressions by a number of laymen and researchers such as Sardinia (1964),

male homosexual prostitution is not a new angle nor a modern twist to the oldest profession. Benjamin and Masters (1964) cited that this variety is about equally as ancient as the female heterosexual type. Homosexual prostitution temples existed among the Hebrews and in India. The so-called boy harlots plied their trade in the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome, China, Japan and elsewhere.

Historical data as presented by Benjamin and Masters (1964) are sufficiently numerous to account for the prevalence and existence of male homosexual prostitution in most cultures and societies. But due to practical consideration, a more detailed presentation of these historical evidences is not warranted in this paper.

The published literature and other relevant research materials concerning male homosexual prostitutes in the Philippines are few to the point of rarity. To be sure some curious observers make occasional reports about its occurrences in the urban communities particularly, Manila. It is perhaps only Sardinia's (1964) report and the recent Garcia (1975) study that helped fill this research gap. The former introduced the existence of the underground "call boy" racket in Manila way back in the early 60's, while the latter made a survey of this

breed of prostitutes at a brothel-gaybar in Quezon City but made no intensive elaboration and evaluation of its dynamics which is of greater interest to social scientists.

The so-called "call boy subculture" as stipulated in the present article, is thus assumed to thrive in metropolitan Manila through a clandestine and covert set-up. This is the result of an apparent incompatibility with the prevailing Philippine social norm; homosexual prostitution is interdicted and relatively unknown and unrecognized by the greater social entity. The rarity of related studies may also serve as indirect evidence to that effect. Prospective researchers perhaps may be socially inhibited to undertake the project.

It is then the aim of this paper to explore the nature of this "call boy subculture," and thus to further examine its mode of operation and present a more or less substantial and general description of such. This objective may still appear too broad but in the light of the present scarcity of data and information regarding the topic of inquiry, this is unavoidable. What is feasible is simply to relate and clarify relevant issues about the problem at hand. But at any rate, the writer deemed it necessary to restrict the setting of investigation to a brothel-gaybar located somewhere in the Sampaloc area within the periphery of the University Belt. Superficial visiting of other known "call boy" hangouts in Manila, and Quezon City also yielded some significant insights. Methods of observation and depth-interview with call boys, working in the establishment, are adapted in order to facilitate and accumulate data in line with the purpose of this inquiry.

METHOD

The Setting.

A brothel-gaybar situated in Manila in what is oftentimes referred to as the University Belt in Sampaloc district is a "hospitality" establishment (owned and operated by homosexuals) where call boys are found numerous and readily accessible, catering specifically to the whims and desires of male homosexuals and aggressive or lonely females,

though rarely. The study was conducted in a three-storey building, with the lower flat being the bar proper, and the upper two floors called the "casa".

The bar, approximately 4x9x3 meters in dimension, is arranged in a very simple manner with square tables placed along both sides of the walls where a cushion-furnished bench is attached and small cube-like stools, some resembling a die and others painted with designs similar to playing cards, that can readily be carried from one table to the other. The narrow space between these, serve as the dancing hall. On the other side just perpendicular to the walls, beside the main entry, is a conspicuous, semi-circular platform just enough to stage one or two male burlesque dancers. (Sometimes this is used for presenting call boys to customers). This corner is sketched with panoramic scene and is well-lighted with revolving lights of different colors fixed in the ceiling a little distance from the platform. The rest of the pad is barely illumined by colored lights and by infrared lamp or black light. Opposite this side is a bar where the cashier is stationed. And facing the bar, lies another door used as an alternate entry and exit (going into the garage and finally to the street) since the front door is closed whenever there is an ongoing illegitimate call boy show. At the farthest end of the flat somewhere to the right is another door with a rectangular opening which is presumably intended for raid-warning. This hospitality establishment had been raided twice in 1975, according to the cashier. Beyond this door are the kitchen, the lavatory at the right and the staircase at the left. This staircase leads to the upper floors, the casa, with several small airconditioned rooms where call boys and customers perform their homosexual plays or what they refer to as *enteran* (See Fig. 1-1).

Respondents

Male homosexual prostitutes who frequent aforementioned brothel-gaybar have been selected out of several other groups from different call boy hangouts scattered in various areas of Metro Manila. They are numerous found to cluster inside and in front

of the said establishment, and appear readily accessible as noted by the writer right at the first visit with some other friends. This is much unlike the other places, initially surveyed at the onset of this study, where difficulty of figuring out and interviewing them are encountered.

Call boys in this brothel-gaybar are seen either sitted or standing up and walking around (and some others even loitering outside the bar). They are conspicuously posing and waiting for prospective clients to single them out as "entertainers" and possibly their *kaenter* (bed-partners). They are garbed in varied styles to suit the different tastes of customers. Some are in decent clothes and others are in casual or rugged attires. Moreover, they make body-movements or positioning, and other related non-verbal cues and signals intended to attract their homosexual patrons.

Business for this group of prostitutes, who are mainly youths in their early teens and up into the early twenties, appears rather competitive in this particular hospitality establishment. This is because they are comparatively big in number and noticeably disproportionate to the relatively smaller turnover of clients visiting the place. Such condition may well be the reason for their aggressive advances when dealing with presumably homosexual customers.

Though there are too many male homosexual prostitutes (about 30 to 50 call boys available in a night) operating in the site of study, only six of them formally served as Ss. The respondents are four 22-year olds and two 18-year olds, practically all unemployed elsewhere and out-of-school (at the time they were interviewed) with the exception of one enrolled in an engineering course at a Manila university. The Ss are ascertained to be connected with the gaybar and dependent upon its operation in that they ply their trade on this particular call boy hangout.

Procedure

The nature and procedure of this inquiry on the call boy subculture is by no means simple. Considering the fact that homosexual prostitution exists only covertly and uses

clandestine manners of operation, the approach to data gathering must therefore use a combination of two methods: the *pakikisama* technique (Santiago and Enriquez, 1976) and the depth interview method. The current researcher found these methods as the most feasible and effective means of gathering and accumulating relevant data which can facilitate clearer and better insights about the problem at hand.

The technique of *pakikisama* is heavily relied upon in this study. It consisted of frequenting the hangout (as much as possible successively), then inviting them to sit down and drink with the inquirer. This initially allowed them to suspect and assume that the investigator is a "silahis" (or convert homosexual) and therefore a prospective client. In this way, establishing contacts with them turned out to be quite easy because the call boys are readily and competitively aggressive in approaching their customers. Here they showed their peculiar manner of attracting and luring the presumed "*silahis*." However, the investigator felt that in such a situation, the kind of interaction created is not conducive to depth interviewing since the Ss resort to superficial faking and manipulative communication whenever in the company of homosexuals or other clientele. This is aside from the deafening noise of the stereo music of the bar. And also, they are prone to leave the table especially when they finally get wind of the idea that there is no forthcoming reward for the night — that is having a bed partner for money. Consistent with the *pakikisama* or *pakapa-kapa* method, the author decided to invite them outside to eat or to drink at his own residence. Invitations for drinking sprees were scheduled during their off-hours, earlier in the day. This was experimented on one of them, who was met right at the first visit to the place. The results turned out favorably that the same approach was employed with the other five respondents. Establishment of the needed rapport was apparently not hard to obtain in this manner.

Despite the attractiveness of the *pakikisama* approach, a number of inconveniences

were encountered, which more or less hindered the flow of this inquiry. The investigator had to have adequate funds for inviting them to eat and to drink; not to mention other minor expenses such as cigarettes, tips and small amounts of transportation money asked from time to time. The project had to be postponed and temporarily discontinued whenever funds were not enough or unavailable. To top it all the time allotted for this manner of research was necessarily consuming. Respondents tended to prolong their stay at the writer's residence even when drinking was terminated. They even bathed and slept at his house. This required vigilance aside from the intense physical energy it demanded on the part of the host.

The present method entailed risks such as the possible occurrence of theft, misdemeanors, and probable involvement in raid round-ups by government security officers. Unfavorable reactions from society at large, inhibitions and fears of being misunderstood cannot be discounted in this study. But since the investigator was hoping to get significant and relevant data, the risks had to be tolerated but of course with adequate precautions. It is only in the *pakikisama* approach where important and sensitive information may be revealed and thus obtained.

While the participant observation technique indeed can maximize data-input more than the *pakikisama* approach as described, ethical considerations prevented the investigator from choosing such an alternative. Either acting as a client or as a call boy demands extremely unrealistic and serious sacrifices. The researcher is liable to suffer severe social criticism which may end up ruining the entire project and, of course, himself. Besides, the method of participant observation demands even more time than the *pakikisama* method which is already time consuming in its own right.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The call boy subculture exists in the urban community of metropolitan Manila, but such occurrence is dependent upon the recent development and social recognition of another subculture, that of the homosexuals, and rela-

ted establishments concomitant to its existence. Its nature and mode of operation are presented here based on observation and interviews initiated by the investigator at a brothel-gaybar which functions as the central core-relative and specific to this delimited study of their activities. The manner of describing it is merely an attempt and therefore quite broad and general.

The call boys interviewed related that they come from big families (with the exception of one, who has only one sister but he had been committed to prison and is only on parole). Three of them have seven siblings and the others have nine and eleven respectively. One informed the researcher that his parents are separated; the three reported that their fathers are already deceased; and the two have their parents old enough and retired from work to support them. They had had early experiences with homosexuals at the age of sixteen or below. Practically all of them are out of school with the exception of one who is currently enrolled in an engineering course and unemployed, except for their present profession, at the time they were interviewed. Each of them keeps a habit or vice (or what they claimed as their *bisyo*) like *toma* (drinking), *jeprox* (drugs), *karera* (gambling in horse races), *chicks* (women), *barkada* (an informal social group), etc. In line with these, call boys are even usually *maluho* (luxurious) in their lifestyles.

The findings regarding their personal background seem to imply that call boys, are generally products of what may be described as "inferior homes". These indicate their apparent susceptibility to being initiated into prostitution. Thus when they first came to the brothel-gay-bar, sexually submitting to homosexual patrons for money or other related rewards turned out to be rather easy. The place has then provided them opportunities to compensate for their socio-economic inadequacies.

As one of them said, "*Mahal ko pa itong lugar na ito kaysa sa pagbibisita sa mga chicks. Paano dito ko nagkakapera, nasusunod ang gusto. Nakakabili ng mga damit at iba pang gamit. Di mo kailangang humingi o umasa pa sa magulang. Nakapagbibigay pa nga ako sa nanay*"

ko ng kaunting pera." He simply meant that he likes the place more than visiting his girl-friends since it enables him to obtain financial rewards through which he can satisfy most of his material needs that are oftentimes deprived from him or wanting in his own household. A somewhat similar reason that is economic in nature is cited by the rest of the respondents (e.g., they can buy or have what they like; they can join many "happenings" such as *chicks*, *toma* and going to classy places previously inaccessible to them; and they can even have a "steady" who may support their needs or perhaps even finance their education and other related needs.)

Although the call boys commonly claim that their being in the profession is mainly financially motivated, there are evidences suggesting other motives though un verbalized which reinforce them to hold on to their "work." An outspoken respondent who earlier mentioned that he is looking for a more decent job, later confided to the investigator that it is difficult to quit and do away with such kind of occupation. He related, "*Dalawa'ng chicks ko, pero buhat ng magawi ako dito, natigil ang pagdalaw ko, nawili sa mga bakla. Siyempre di ko rin nakakaligtaan umano sa mga hostess.*" (I have two girls; but ever since I went here, I stopped visiting them. I got stuck with homosexuals. But of course, I seldom forget to have sexual relations with female prostitutes. And at the last instance that this call boy was interviewed, he said that being in the business seems habitual. These statements appear to indicate sexual enjoyment experienced with homosexual clients. To say the least, their clients manage to stimulate the call boys' interest in their clients as fellow human beings.

A case can be made for labelling call boys, particularly the one above, as homosexuals. But any conclusion regarding the matter would be hasty at the present stage of inquiry. Further data should be gathered and examined in order to construct adequate evidences. Besides, as these respondents have differentiated themselves from their homosexual clients, this differentiation somehow assures them that they are not homosexuals — at least, phenomena-

logically, as long as they perceive themselves and act as call boys. Conversations with some of the respondents also indicate that one defense mechanism they employ to guard against defining themselves as homosexuals is the lack or low level of emotional involvement with their partners during the sex plays. This is also in spite of the fact that they obtain sexual pleasures and also perform homosexual functions (e.g., *suso* or fellatio and *uring* or pederasty) on their customers. Whether the call boy profession leads to a homosexual personality or not remains a questions to be answered by more intensive studies.

Male homosexual prostitutes in the study cited have been found to have no formal organization whatsoever. They are not even recruited by the management of the said hospitality establishment. Call boys merely come and wait in the place for prospective homosexual customers. Between the management and the call boys, mutual cooperation is observed. They both contribute to each other's business and therefore to the operation of their illicit industry. Call boys are able to find clients in the place which in turn help the management obtain profits in the form of drinks paid for by the customers, and also the fees from the rented rooms, etc. On the part of the operators, the floor manager and the so-called "entertainer" act in their capacity as pimps. The pimps act in behalf of a call boy they physically like and whose remuneration for acting as pimps takes the form of a tryst or sexual privilege with the call boy.

The maintenance of security is facilitated by the call boys themselves. The management then complements this with its connection with alleged government agents.

As can be noticed, the call boy subculture chooses to function through informal and simple mutual cooperation. It is the writer's opinion that such a form is necessary and practical for its underground perpetuation. Since this is inconsistent with the prevailing socio-cultural norms, it has to operate stealthily. And to maintain this relatively covert mode of operation, its organizations must at least be informal, with mutual cooperation sustaining it.

CONCLUSION

The present study is necessarily incomplete. This is due to lack of time and other resources. The data gathered here are lacking and inadequate to classify important aspects of male homosexual prostitution. Besides, present status of the call boy subculture is in the latent state and still is struggling to perpetuate itself within the Philippine socio-cultural environment where it is assumed to be largely unrecognized and perhaps interdicted. It is thus suggested that further studies be undertaken in line with this topic of inquiry.

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