



A Study on Masculinity: “A Cheerleader Boy is girlies? I don’t give a care”

Inggraini Hartono¹, Matheus Yumarnamto²

Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala, Indonesia

email: ¹englishmaster.inggraini.h.20@ukwms.ac.id*

*Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

This paper studies the masculinity discourses emerging in the perception of a cheerleader boy and his friends. The boy is an active cheerleader’s member who also train some other cheerleaders. This study aimed to find out (1) how a cheerleader boy perceives the idea of masculinity and (2) how the closest person thinks of him as a cheerleader boy. Using the three theoretical tools of inquiry suggested by Gee (2005) for critical discourse analysis (1) Identity, (2) Discourse, and (3) Perspectives, several themes are found from the interview with Bob, the cheerleader boy and Anna, his close friend. They are (1) Come join, (2) It’s another competition, (3) I don’t give a care, (4) Dance is a matter of art, (5) It depends on the person, (6) As long as you’re happy, (7) He’s a dancer. While from Nana’s perspective, I found two themes. They are (1) Cheerleader boy is cool and (2) easy-going and friendly.

Keywords: masculinity, cheerleader boy, identity, discourse, perspective, themes

First Receive: 17 January 2022	Revised: 28 March 2022	Accepted: 9 May 2022
Final Proof Received: 17 May 2022	Published: 30 June 2022	
How to cite (in APA style): Hartono, I., & Yumarnamto, M. (2022). A Study on Masculinity: “A Cheerleader Boy is girlies? I don’t give a care”. <i>ELITE Journal</i> , 4(1), 1-10.		

INTRODUCTION

The word ‘cheerleader’ will make us to think of a group of beautiful girls who supports the sport team by their synchronized cheers and dance routines and miniskirts. Cheerleaders are known to be pretty and in great shape and they call it a cheerleader look. Hence, it brings oddity when we see boys as cheerleaders. As I am teaching in one of private senior high schools, I see this tendency when I heard the audience of DBL; which was established in 2008 to manage the Developmental Basketball League in Indonesia, shouted ‘sissy’ and laughed at the cheerleader group who got all boys for the members. It made me think of this phenomenon and referred it to the study of masculinity theory.

Back then, cheerleading is dominated by men and only men are allowed to be cheerleaders but because of the world war which needs men to participate, so women take control in cheerleading and continue to today. In Indonesia, cheerleading is dominantly filled

with women and it becomes the place for them to say that they are pretty and superior if they can join the cheerleader groups.

From what I experienced while watching my students' playing basketball, I started to think of what people (especially the closest ones) think of male cheerleaders and what makes them think that being a cheerleader boy is not masculine. These thoughts will be the questions for my research as follows:

1. How does a cheerleader boy perceive the idea of masculinity?
2. How does the closest person think of a cheerleader boy?

By exploring the answer to those questions, it is hoped that the findings could give an insightful information on how we perceive the idea of masculinity on cheerleader boy using discourse analysis. Moreover, it could give insight for the society in treating cheerleader boy properly as there is a stereotype in society that cheerleading should be girls' job because they have to sway like what girls do and boys should walk gallantly. Seven themes emerged in the analysis. The themes were come join, it's another competition, I don't give a care, dance is a matter of art, it depends on the person, as long as you're happy, and he's a dancer. These themes are introduced and discussed further in Findings and Discussions.

METHOD

Using the three theoretical tools of inquiry suggested by Gee (2005) for critical discourse analysis, (1) Identity, (2) Discourse, and (3) Perspectives, I interview Bob and Anna using Zoom meeting. The questions for interviewing Bob were about the first time he joined cheerleader team, his opinion if there was any stigma about being a cheerleader, the response of parents if they know about his involvement in the cheerleader team, and the unforgettable memory he ever had. Moreover, the questions for interviewing Nana were about her opinion on cheerleader boy, how she sees a cheerleader boy and how she sees Bob in everyday life.

As mentioned by Dutro (2002), masculinity is seen from biological perspectives and sociocultural perspectives. In this study, I am trying to find out the sociocultural perspectives happened to a cheerleader boy. What the society see in a cheerleader boy and how the cheerleader boy see himself, how his friend sees him as a cheerleader boy, and how his parents see him as a cheerleader boy.

Upon completing the data, I classified the emerging themes for each category further for interpretations of masculinity. The categories are seen from Bob's perspective and from Anna's perspective. In this way, masculinity discourses on the cheerleader boy could be reconstructed and analyzed from the point of view of the gender order happen to the

cheerleader boy. From Bob's perspective, I have several themes. They are (1) Come join, (2) It's another competition, (3) I don't give a care, (4) Dance is a matter of art, (5) It depends on the person, (6) As long as you're happy, (7) He's a dancer. While from Anna's perspective, I found two themes. They are (1) Cheerleader boy is cool and (2) easy-going and friendly.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

To answer the two research questions of how a cheerleader boy perceives the idea of masculinity and how the closest person thinks of a cheerleader boy, I analyzed Bob and Anna's narrative or story to see what identities are being enacted, what discourses are at work and in what ways, and what perspectives or viewpoints are Bob and Anna expressing. In order to do it, first I put their answer into themes based on what they say.

From Bob's perspective

Bob was a cheerleader boy in high school and continue to be a dancer and sometimes train cheerleader teams in some schools. He is a quiet person, but active in joining cheerleading competitions in malls and many other cheers competitions.

Theme 1: Come join

The first time I join cheerleader...hmm...actually...I'm telling you a bit about it. The background is hmm...I don't know what it's called...it's like...at that time when I was in junior high school, a friend of mine joked me saying "come join" so, that's the beginning...if seeing from the dance talent, I don't have it in the family's blood, none of them is a dancer. My mom is a dancer and dad is a businessman.

I dance till now, I seldom dance due to the pandemic, I don't train and I don't exercise this year because of pandemic.

Theme 2: It's another competition

I...hmm how is it? In fact, people out there do think that cheerleader doesn't get much attention, because people come for the game, for the athlete, maybe just few of them who will come to watch the dance if it's from the famous schools, but mostly, they will come for the basketball team. In Surabaya, we have DBL, I see cheerleading as a competition, because it is contested. It's another competition besides the basketball competition. I see it that way. It's just that...in the end, cheerleading is there to support the athlete. I feel like, I was there as a cheerleader giving the best at that time. I practice almost every day till 10 P.M at school, after

school till late at night. We also did the physical training, if we did it at school, we went up and down the stairs. If we also give the best for our friends who are competing in the basketball game, it will boost their morale even though it's another competition. I don't if they feel it or not, but I put myself in their shoes, 'oh, this cheerleader though not taken much attention but they give their best, I don't know, but if I were in their position, I see it that way.

Theme 3: I don't give a care

There surely is a common stigma that cheerleader should be girls, but in the end, ya it's ok, it's ok. instead of mocking, I have those who support me, for those who don't, my response: I don't give a care.

The ones I know the hang-on cheerleaders, at the end, they don't give a care, but for those who didn't last long, at that times, you know, high school, they've got pride to keep. But those who can last longer are those who are easy-going, don't give a care.

Theme 4: Dance is a matter of art

Frankly speaking, the dance itself is fun, but for the future plan, I don't think I will dance till thirties or fortyish, my bones will be porous and got older, but from there I know lots of people, the unique ones, because dance is a matter of art, the plus point is there.

Theme 5: It depends on the person

For me, it depends on the case, situation. There are times when I agree and there are times when I don't. Dance is the world of girls, if boys join it means that he's girly...you know what? In dance, the most famous ones are the males and they have wives. Yeach, they're not transgender. It is true that some of them are, I know some of them. For this case, I might agree, it's them and their girly talks and acts. But when you relate dance and being feminine, no, it's all back to the person. Because talking about dance's style. It's a lot. We've got style for girls; the sexy ones, we also got the boys' style; the tough ones, we've got the classy ones. So, the style is a lot, you cannot take them all the same. It all depends on the person and in Indonesia as what I've mentioned earlier. We've got the boys who are girlies, from the way they walk and talk...hi...hi...(waving hands gently like a girl) but when we compare them with the other girl dancers who have the same style, these boys will be more skillful. We have to see them case by case, not the same, in the end, it all depends on the person. If he's girly

and he wants to express it by dancing, it can be, but are those who dance girlies? I don't think so.

Theme 6: As long as you're happy

Mom and dad know I join cheerleader, ya they tease me, dad and his big family, for mom more like as long as you're happy, in the end you're not a gay.

Theme 7: He's a dancer

Actually, they support me, they do, it's only a tease, when he meets his clients, he says "He's a dancer" for me, it's ok. I don't give a care.

My main interest is to see how our data about Bob's motifs can be explored through a close look at his narratives. These stories portray the perspective of Bob on being a cheerleader boy.

At the beginning of my interview, Bob told a story of the first time he joined cheerleader as a coincidence and loved it ever since. Bob did not have a plan to be a cheerleader boy and to be the one is only a sudden decision and it will be the first theme 'Come join'.

In theme 2, Bob highlighted his preference to join as another competition besides basketball competition and he found it interesting. He also mentioned that he can be a help or he called it as boosting the basketball team's morale by giving his best as the cheerleader.

In theme 3, Bob understands the stigma that cheerleader should be girls, but he doesn't give a care and it is the one which makes him and the other cheerleader boys lasts long. Moreover, it was supported by his statements in theme 4 when he said that dance is a matter of art and he makes lots of friends from it. Instead, he feels that dancing in the cheerleader team bring a lot of positive sides. One of them is making lots of friends.

In theme 5, Bob accepts the reality that some cheerleader boys can be girlies in performance but it does not mean that they are transgender. It all depends on the person. He added that in cheerleading, they got many styles which some of them require their masculine act; the tough one. In other way, he is trying to say that cheerleader requires boys.

Theme 6 is what Bob's mother think of him as a cheerleader boy. His mother supported him and let him go as his wish because she just wants to see his son happy. While Bob's father and his family teased him by saying "He is a dancer" (theme 7) though he still

supports Bob by not forbidding him to dance. By teasing 'He is a dancer, his father thinks that boys don't dance.

From Anna's perspective

Theme 1: Cheerleader boy is cool

I think being a cheerleader boy is cool, because it's rare for a boy to join cheerleader. Then, for the cheerleading now, it's not only dancing, but they've got movement which needs boys. They are not only asked to dance but also the strength and special skill. So, I think, it's a common to have boys in the cheerleader, because what's needed is strength so that they are seen as the strong men.

Theme 2: Easy-going and friendly

I see Bob as I see other boys. He is an easy going and friendly person. There's no difference between him and other boys. But oh, maybe with girls, he can be more easy-going and friendlier because what I see is he also gets lots of female friends.

Using the three theoretical tools of inquiry suggested by Gee (2005) for critical discourse analysis, (1) Identity, (2) Discourse, and (3) Perspectives, there are some findings from this study.

First, I will explain (1) The N-Identities or Nature Identities due to their genes. Both Bob and Anna is Indonesian because they have Indonesian parents which make them Indonesian people. (2) I-Identities or Institutional Identities because of their achievements or positions in an institution. Bob and Anna were my students in high school and Bob was a cheerleader for high school's basketball team and is a dancer and a trainer now, while Anna was Bob's classmate and close friend. She was and is active in students' organization in high school and in university. (3) D-Identities or Discursive Identities due to their way of speech and act in a society, Anna sees Bob as a cool and easy-going person who can mingle with girls where not every boy able to do it and (4) A-Identities or Affinity Identities, I do not see Bob and Anna as fans of anything. They both neutral.

The next tool I used is discourse. By analyzing the words from Bob, his father, mother and his friend, I found more about their ways of thinking, speaking, acting regarding the idea of masculinity and being a cheerleader boy. From the discourse in what Bob and Anna say when interviewed, I found some themes related to their stance in this topic. They are (1) Come join, (2) It's another competition, (3) I don't give a care, (4) Dance is a matter of

art, (5) It depends on the person, (6) As long as you're happy, (7) He's a dancer. While from Anna's perspective, I found two themes. They are (1) Cheerleader boy is cool and (2) easy-going and friendly.

Perspectives is the third analytical tool suggested by Gee (2005) and the significant analytical tool used during this analysis. I try to understand the perspective the speaker is trying to express which will be the main point of this study as I try to find out how the cheerleader boy, his father and mother and his friend think of him related to the idea of masculinity.

From theme one, Bob did not think that being a cheerleader boy is awkward because he accepted his junior high friends' offer to join the cheerleader team. It is supported by what he said in theme two until five. He accepts cheerleader as another competition beside basketball competition which can be a motivation for the basketball team and he does not give a care for those who mocked him because he mentioned that there are many male friends of his who got married and signaling that they are straight. For him, dancing is art which he said it in theme four. But he did not mention the art he meant that the dance has. Instead he mentioned the future prospect of dancing until he is old which could mean that he did not think that dancing career will be forever. However, he also admitted that some of male dancers are girly in the way they talk and behave, and some are transgender, but he denied it that every boy in the cheerleading or dancing team is girlish, because he added that the styles in dance is a lot. Not only the sexy style, but also the tough and classy styles. He also highlighted his opinion on it by repeating his statement in the last statement "We have to see them case by case, not the same, in the end, it all depends on the person. If he's girly and he wants to express it by dancing, it can be, but are those who dance girly? I don't think so."

Theme six to seven is what Bob's parent see in Bob as a cheerleader boy. In theme six, Bob's mother accepted him to be everything he wants as long as Bob happy and not being a gay, while Bob's father in theme seven saw it a bit awkward for a boy to be a dancer. Bob told that his father would tease him by saying "He's a dancer". It is a tease because Bob's father thinks it is odd for a boy to be dancer. If it is normal, he would not say it and highlight it that Bob is a dancer, because we won't highlight something that is normal.

For Anna, Bob's close friend, she sees many positive sides from being a cheerleader boy. From theme 1, Anna sees cheerleader boy as a cool boy and common, because in cheerleader there are movements which need boys' strength. Moreover, in theme 2, Anna feels (because she is using the word 'maybe') that being a cheerleader boy can make Bob has a lot of female friends due to his characteristics. Anna's use of comparison (more easy-going

and friendlier) shows that she's comparing cheerleader boy and the boys who are not cheerleaders which is also the other positive side from being a cheerleader boy.

CONCLUSION

The result of the research showed that Using critical discourse analysis aimed at analyzing the content, context and forms of the narrative data and using the three theoretical tools of inquiry suggested by Gee (2005) for critical discourse analysis, (1) Identity, (2) Discourse, and (3) Perspectives from the interview result from the participant, I found that Bob see cheerleader boy as a common and positive role, though Bob agrees on the stigma from the society that cheerleader is for girls and the boys who are girlies. Hence, Bob also added the point that not all of cheerleader boys are girlies and transgender. Instead some of them have married and have families.

While theme six and seven are Bob's parents' perspective on cheerleader boy. They still think it is unique to have a boy dancing, though they still support him by not forbidding him to dance. By teasing him 'He's a dancer', his father confirmed the argument in the society that boys don't dance. While his mother is more open minded or I can say it's probably because of her love to her son, so as long as her son is happy, she will be happy, too.

Bob's friend (Anna) also mentioned that being a cheerleader boy is common and cool, because it's rare to have boys in the cheerleading team and she found the benefit of being cheerleader boy that she cannot find in other boys. She mentioned that cheerleader boy can be easily close to girls.

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