

FILIPINO MEN IN CRISIS: NEGOTIATING MASCULINITIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted various societal structures, including long-standing constructions of masculinity. While discussions on masculinity continue, Filipino masculine identity remains underexamined, particularly regarding its renegotiation during the crisis. This study employs a constructivist framework and narrative research method to examine how Filipino men's experiences, practices, and ideas of masculinity evolved throughout the pandemic. The research reveals that hegemonic masculinity persisted, especially through responsibilities at home and family care, alongside local constructs such as *diskarte* (resourcefulness) and *matibay na loob* (strong will). However, this hegemony was tested by economic and psychological hardships. Men who were seen as *mahina ang loob* (weak-willed), *tamad* (lazy), and *matigas ang ulo* (stubborn) were subordinated within this masculine hierarchy. Yet, this subordination often overlooked the structural difficulties faced by lower-income and psychologically distressed men during the pandemic. My findings suggest that while hegemonic masculinity endured, it also faced significant challenges, reflecting the complexity

of Filipino men's attempts to adapt and assert their masculinity amid the crisis. In their pursuit of overcoming these challenges, variations of hegemonic masculinity emerged, underscoring both the dynamic nature of masculine ideals and the continued dominance of men within these frameworks.

Keywords: Masculinities, Filipino Masculinity, Hegemonic Masculinity, Subordinated Masculinity, COVID-19 pandemic

ABSTRAK

Ang pandemyang COVID-19 ay nagdulot ng malalaking hamon sa mga istrukturang panlipunan, kabilang na ang matagal nang mga pananaw ukol sa pagkalalaki. Bagamat patuloy ang mga talakayan tungkol sa pagkalalaki, hindi pa rin lubusang napag-aaralan ang identidad ng mga lalaking Pilipino, partikular na sa paraan ng pag-aangkop nito sa gitna ng krisis. Ginamit sa pag-aaral na ito ang konstruksyonistang teorya at naratibong pamamaraan upang suriin kung paano nabago ang mga pananaw, gawi, at karanasan ng mga lalaking Pilipino patungkol sa pagkalalaki sa panahon ng pandemya. Natuklasan na ang hegemonikong pagkalalaki ay nanatiling matatag, lalo na sa mga responsibilidad sa pamilya at tahanan, habang sinusuportahan ng mga lokal na konsepto gaya ng diskarte at tibay ng loob. Sa kabila nito, naharap sa pagsubok ang mga kalalakihan dahil sa mga hamong ekonomiko at sikolohikal. Ang mga lalaking itinuturing na mahina ang loob, tamad, at matigas ang ulo ay sumailalim sa subordinasyon ng hegemonikong pagkalalaki. Samantala,

ang ganitong subordinasyon ay hindi sapat na kumikilala sa mga paghihirap na naranasan ng mga mas maralitan kalalalahanan at ng mga nakararanas ng suliraning pangkaisipan sa panahon ng krisis. Ang aking mga natuklasan ay nagpapahiwatig na habang nanatili ang hegemonikong pagkalalaki, ito ay naharap din sa mga seryosong hamon, na nagpapakita ng komplikasyon sa pagsisikap ng mga lalaking Pilipino na muling ipahayag ang kanilang pagkalalaki sa harap ng krisis. Sa kanilang pagnanais na malampasan ang mga pagsubok, lumitaw ang iba't ibang anyo ng hegemonikong pagkalalaki, na nagpapakita ng patuloy na dinamismo ng mga ideyal na pagkalalaki at ng kanilang kapangyarihan sa lipunan.

Mga Keyword: Mga Pagkalalaki, Pagkalalaki, Hegemonikong Pagkalalaki, Isinailalim na Pagkalalaki, COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted various facets of life, stretching beyond our imagination. The spread of the disease, mass unemployment, and social isolation posed numerous challenges to economic, psychological, and cultural spheres. In the Philippines, the militaristic lockdown measures imposed by the national government failed to effectively curb infections and mortality, resulting in over 57,000 deaths from COVID-19 between 2020 and 2022 (Tomacruz and Magsambol 2022). Alongside this, the pandemic significantly affected the mental and emotional health of the population, exacerbating psychological distress among Filipinos (Seriño et al. 2021).

Furthermore, families were forced to collectively respond to these drastic changes. Many Filipino families experienced financial strain due to job losses and the need to adjust to the “new normal,” including the shift to online schooling and the psychological stress of confinement. As families adapted to the demands of remote work and education, the burden of managing the household often fell on the family unit, particularly in lower-income households (Cleofas et al. 2021). At the same time, families were required to play a more active role in supporting students during online classes and modular learning. However, this increased involvement was an additional burden for many, particularly for poor families that had to balance educational supervision with household management. Thus, the pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities, with wealthier families being able to afford better access to technology while poorer families struggled with limited resources (Marquez et al. 2020).

As presented, the pandemic caused significant shifts within families in various ways. Economic challenges,

the shift to online schooling, and psychological stress led to changes in family roles and responsibilities. For instance, many men found themselves renegotiating their identities as financial providers, while others took on increased caregiving roles due to job losses or the need to assist with childcare and home management (Cleofas et al. 2021). While substantial research has appropriately highlighted the disproportionate burdens faced by women and LGBTQ+ individuals during the pandemic, focusing on how their struggles intersect with systemic gender inequalities (Ofreneo 2020; UN Women 2020), the experiences and meaning-making of Filipino men remain underexamined in the literature.

This gap does not reflect a lack of relevance or being in competition with other gender studies but rather highlights the need to further examine how men's roles and masculinities are shaped by – and in turn shape – family dynamics during crises. Though men have often been studied within the broader context of family structures, exploring their specific experiences during the pandemic can provide a clearer understanding of how they negotiate shifts in expectations, isolation, and economic uncertainty. As Castillo (2021) highlights, incorporating a gender-sensitive perspective that includes men and masculinities in policy discussions can help reshape the Philippine government's pandemic response to be more gender-sensitive.

In the Philippines, idealized notions of Filipino masculinity are generally characterized by a sense of responsibility, family-orientedness, and strong will (Rubio and Green 2009; Valledor-Lukey 2012; Aguilin-Dalisay et al. 2010). These ideals are rooted in local stereotypes and societal expectations among men, emphasizing *lakas ng loob* (strength of will) and *paninindigan* (conviction). With this, men and fathers commonly assume the roles of financial providers and breadwinners in the Filipino

family (Guthrie and Azores 1967; Licuanan 1979). These idealized constructions became hegemonic—not necessarily dominantly practiced among the population but rather aspired (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005).

Despite the hegemony of certain ideals, masculinity is not static. It changes over time and is shaped by varying contexts and circumstances (Ruxton and Burrell 2020). Hence, masculinities must be understood and contextualized within different classes, cultures, ethnicities, periods, and societies simultaneously. Unfortunately, as Angeles (2001) argues, scholarship on Filipino men and masculinities centers on the “problematic” and toxic kind of masculinity. Moreover, studies show that masculinity’s dynamic nature becomes more evident during times of crisis. Men transcend and renegotiate traditional or hegemonic notions of masculinity during periods of change, such as instances of unemployment or assumption of childcare responsibilities (Morgan 1992; Brandth and Kvande 1998).

This research engages with the ongoing discussion and literature on Filipino masculinities. By examining Filipino masculinity at specific moments in time, more specifically during the COVID-19 crisis, I explore nuanced perspectives on men’s construction of being a man by answering the following research questions:

- a. What forms of hegemonic and subordinated masculinities manifest during the pandemic?
- b. What negotiated forms of masculinities emerged during the pandemic?

In this research, I problematize how the pandemic impacted the idea and practice of masculinity among Filipino men. Specifically, I seek to identify characteristics

of hegemonic masculinity during the pandemic and pinpoint how certain masculinities deviated from it. Additionally, I make sense of the negotiation process by Filipino men as confronted by the crisis where they claim, rework, or reject masculine roles and scripts.

Moreover, this article discusses *pagkalalaki* (masculinity) both as a social construction and as informed by Connell's (1987) conceptualization of hegemonic and marginalized or subordinated masculinities. I contrast this perspective with a nuanced understanding of masculinity in the Philippines following the work of Rubio and Green (2009) on the ideal characteristics of Filipino masculinity and the emphasis of Valledor-Lukey (2012) on the multidimensionality of *pagkalalaki*. Lastly, I present the emerging themes of idealized and subordinated masculinities during the COVID-19 pandemic and describe the negotiation and reworking of hegemonic Filipino masculinities in contrast with subordinated masculinities as storied by the respondents in evolving contexts.

Review of Related Literature

In this section, I discuss masculinity as a social construction and as informed by Connell's (1987) conceptualization of hegemonic, marginalized, and subordinated masculinities. This paper heavily recognizes the intricacies and differences between Western constructs of masculinities and the locally structured and conceived notions of masculinities. As such, I contrast this perspective with a nuanced understanding of masculinity as *pagkalalaki* – a Filipino local construct. Lastly, I present various characterizations of Filipino masculinity as grounded by sociocultural factors in the Philippines.

Masculinity

Masculinity refers to aspects of men's behaviors, roles, and meanings that fluctuate over time. It is often prescribed to men and shaped by social institutions and interactions (Connell 1995; Kimmel 2000). Masculinity can be understood using the sex-role theory, which highlights the functions of men to participate in the labor force, represent the family, and make decisions as head of the household (Parsons 1942). Alternatively, masculinity can be seen as a performance of roles and social scripts, borrowing from Butler's (1999) notion of gender performativity. In the case of fathers, the performance of the paternal role establishes the identity not only as the father but also as a man because gender is a continuous identity construction. Both the role of the breadwinner and its performance are constantly linked to the performance of masculinity because work is assumed to be a major basis of masculine identity (Morgan 1992).

In contrast, Connell problematizes how such functions came to be and why these should be rigidly imposed. She has created numerous works on masculinities to show that gender roles are complex, and while men do dominate over women, men may also dominate other men within a patriarchal society. Instead of viewing gender roles as something static - based on sex and assigned at birth, Connell states that gender roles are dynamic and acquired through socialization (Atkinson et al. 2015). They also highlight that there are actually different types and hierarchies of masculinities and femininities, which also marginalize each other (Yang 2020). Hence, Carrigan et al. (1985) theorized the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 832), hegemonic masculinity "embodied the currently most

honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it.” However, not all men are able to perform this type of masculinity. When men do not or cannot conform to the hegemonic standards of the ideal man, such masculinities are subordinated and marginalized. Yang (2020) emphasizes that hegemonic masculinity maintains its dominance through domination and consent, often subordinating other masculinities, such as those associated with gay men or men who exhibit emotional vulnerability. These subordinated masculinities are often stigmatized or delegitimized by the hegemonic form (Connell 1995). As Yang (2020) argues, hegemonic masculinity operates by reinforcing this hierarchy, where subordinated masculinities are marginalized through cultural consent, discursive dominance, and institutionalization. This relational nature underscores how masculinities are defined in opposition to one another, with certain masculinities legitimizing the dominance of others.

As an illustration, gay men may exhibit traits viewed as ‘feminine’ or ‘androgynous,’ leading to marginalization by other men. Hence, within a group of men, there is marginalization and conflict (Cheng 1999). Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity provides a framework to analyze the hierarchies of masculinity that exist within Filipino society.

***Pagkalalaki* as Filipino Masculinity**

In the Philippines, it is a popular assumption that the concept of ‘masculinity’ is equivalent to our own thinking and perception in fleshing out the concept of ‘*pagkalalaki*’. However, according to Rogelia Pe-Pua and Elizabeth Protacio-Marcelino (2000: 59), there is no word that perfectly captures the essence of the concept of *pagkalalaki* in the English language, “but approximately,

it means 'masculinity', 'maleness', 'manhood', or all of these."

De Castro (1995) shared a well-detailed account of the various dimensions of *pagiging lalaki* and how this is determined according to aspects such as physical characteristics, overcoming obstacles, *palagay ng puso*, *loob*, and intuition - all of which show the flexibility of the concept as it is a reflection of our real, lived experiences. He also adds *pagiging lalaki* is a term based more on the sex assigned at birth. Meanwhile, *pagkalalaki* is more of a sociological construct concerning roles and expectations of men in society, particularly within institutions like family and community. In addition, it is psychological because the personal perspective of the person concerned cannot be ignored. In the end, this is the only perspective that will allow a person to express their own views (136).

For this study, I use the term masculinity to refer to *pagkalalaki* in the sociological sense, focusing on the tension between positive, hegemonic traits and those subordinated characteristics within the larger ideals of masculinities.

Filipino Family, Fatherhood and Masculinity

In the Philippines, traditional fatherhood has long emphasized the role of the father as the provider and disciplinarian (Guthrie and Azores 1967; Licuanan 1979). This aligns with the concept of hegemonic masculinity, where financial provision and authority within the family reinforce the father's masculine identity (Connell 1995). However, recent decades have seen Filipino fathers taking on more nurturing and supportive roles with their children, reflecting a shift towards emotional involvement alongside traditional responsibilities (Medina 2001).

Tan (1989) described many overseas Filipino fathers as “dilettantes”—affectionate but unable to be physically present in their children’s lives, underscoring the tension between providing financially and being emotionally available.

Filipino fathers also navigate changes in their roles due to economic or social challenges. Jurilla’s study (1986) highlights that fathers in rural areas, facing economic insecurity, may assert their masculinity through dominance and emotional withdrawal. Yet, some fathers still engage in activities like storytelling, helping with homework, and spending time with their children (Medina 2001). These actions reflect a broader negotiation of masculinity, where fathers balance traditional roles with caregiving and emotional support. This balance illustrates how paternal identity in the Philippines is continually reshaped by social expectations and in different situations, as fathers incorporate nurturing roles alongside their duties as breadwinners.

Filipino Masculinity

Conceptualizations of masculinity by Filipino men are largely defined by physical strength and the ability to fulfill obligations. One is considered a ‘real’ man or *tunay na lalaki* if they are principled. Meanwhile, having a family and a stable job to provide for their needs means fulfillment (Aguiling-Dalisay et al. 2000).

As such, Rubio and Green (2009) describe seven constructs to define the ideal characteristics of Filipino masculinity: a sense of responsibility, family-orientedness, respect for women and elders, integrity, intellectual pursuit, strength, and a sense of community. A sense of responsibility was seen in being able to prepare for one’s future role as head of the family through a commitment

to hard work. Related to this is the concept of family-orientedness. As the future head of the family, one should be able to value one's family and provide for their needs. This is seen as the "ultimate indicator of a truly masculine male in the Philippines" (Aguiling-Dalisay et al. 2000; Tan 1989, as cited in Rubio & Green 2009, 62). Respect for women and elders is related to adopting a more egalitarian approach in the family, where the wife is seen as a partner. Integrity is seen as following ethical standards such as honesty, trustworthiness, morality, and *palabra de honor*. Intellectual pursuit was transformed into Intelligence and Academic Achievement, as shown through affinity for school. Strength is related to physical strength and conviction. Lastly, a sense of community is related to *pakikisama* (Rubio and Green 2009; 2011). I elaborate on the following characteristics of Filipino masculinity in the context of the pandemic.

At the time of the pandemic, upon which social conditions and institutions change, this basis of Filipino masculinity can be further understood and explored through possible manifestations and departures from it. I also highlight Valledor-Lukey's (2012) work on femininity and masculinity, which emphasizes the relationship between gender and self-concept. This provides further insight into Filipino masculinity. According to Valledor-Lukey, Filipino masculinity is multidimensional, featuring positive and negative characteristics. It can be disciplined (*disiplinado*) and brave (*matapang*) and, at the same time, stubborn (*matigas ang ulo*) and rash (*padalos-dalos*). As I navigate through Filipino masculinities during the pandemic, these shall help in the observation of the characteristics of Filipino masculinity. Moreover, grounding my study on these theoretical pinnings of Filipino masculinity shall provide a nuanced understanding of our own sense of self and the construction of gender in the local setting.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this study, I utilized a qualitative approach to make sense of Filipino men's constructed meanings of masculinities - particularly hegemonic and peripheral masculinities - during the pandemic. I conducted in-depth interviews in Filipino and used open-ended questions to converse with key participants. I also applied the insights of Holstein and Gubrium (1997) on active interviewing, which views respondents' insights as co-constructed realities rather than static reports, fostering a dynamic interaction between interviewer and interviewee. With a semi-structured guide, interviews generally lasted between 35 to 55 minutes. These were recorded for transcription, stored securely, and kept confidential.

Cresswell's (2006) narrative research method, which is ideal for exploring life stories and the evolution of identities over time, was used to trace the men's experiences across various life stages, specifically during the pandemic - such as early lockdown responses, role changes in family life, and evolving work responsibilities - to better understand their identity as men. These stages include their coping mechanism, responsibilities, work situations, family arrangements, and domestic and public activities. I also made them reflect on these stages to flesh out and understand their identities as men, their constructions of meaning, and the influence of the pandemic, all as shaped by their sociocultural context and familial responsibilities. Additionally, as Connell (1991) notes, studying shifts in the constitution of masculinity can be challenging because of the dynamic environment. Anchoring these life stages and narratives guided the respondents effectively in reflecting on their experiences and the evolution of their masculine identities during the crisis.

Thus, the respondents' life stories and reflections or "epiphanies" on their experiences during the pandemic became the primary data that I memoed and coded to identify emerging themes and categories. Through a thematic analysis, I interpret and present the data in this research through the emergent themes and by constructing archetypes of how men navigated masculinities during the COVID-19 crisis.

I developed a set of open-ended interview questions designed to allow respondents to freely share their personal experiences and perspectives. The questions covered various aspects of their lives during the pandemic, including their experiences, responsibilities, work, family dynamics, and notions of masculinity. These questions were intended to explore themes organically without imposing specific preconceived frameworks. For instance, questions like "*Paano niyo po mailalarawan ang karanasan niyo noong nagsimula ang pandemya?*" and "*Ano po ang mga tungkulin na sinusubukan niyo pong gampanan nitong pandemiya?*" encouraged respondents to reflect deeply on their roles and challenges, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how their masculine identities were constructed and negotiated. By focusing on the experiences of the respondents, the themes related to men's masculinities, roles, and practices during the pandemic emerged from their narratives, ensuring that the data gathered was grounded in the realities of the participants rather than being shaped by predetermined categories.

Data collection was conducted from April to May 2022 during the "tail end" end of the pandemic, and with ethical considerations for this study still including the observation of pandemic health protocols, all data collection was conducted online. Through online messaging platforms, I sent invitation letters to participants stating pertinent research information such as the overview, objectives,

procedures, and my contact details. Upon confirmation and signing of consent forms, the respondents were reminded of their rights to confidentiality, the secure handling of their information, and their right to withdraw at any time. These were reiterated throughout the study. Interviews were conducted via online communication platforms such as Zoom, Viber, and Facebook Messenger, all selected based on the participants' accessibility and convenience. Because participants may share unpleasant pandemic experiences, I made sure to be more sensitive and careful in conducting the interviews. I also assigned them pseudonyms to protect their privacy and identities.

As a cis-heterosexual man, I acknowledge that my positionality may have influenced the interpretation of masculinities in this study. However, I maintained a reflexive approach throughout the research process to center the respondents' perspectives. In instances where participants would say, "*Bilang lalaki, alam mo yun*" (As a man, you know what I mean), I made a conscious effort to probe further rather than accept their statements at face value. I would often clarify that I did not fully understand what they were referring to, encouraging them to elaborate. This reflexivity allowed for a deeper exploration of their experiences rather than assuming shared knowledge. At the same time, my positionality also provided certain privileges, as participants may have felt more comfortable sharing personal insights with a fellow man. Despite these dynamics, this study provides valuable insights into how Filipino men reflect on and navigate their identities during the pandemic, contributing meaningfully to broader discussions of masculinity in times of crisis.

Sampling

To recruit participants for this study, I primarily used purposive non-random sampling to find individuals

whose life stories reflected diverse experiences of masculinity during the pandemic. This approach enabled me to focus on men aged 18 to 59, residing in Manila, and who were either employed or had lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic. These criteria followed the categories outlined by Rubio and Green (2009).

In addition, I employed snowball sampling to extend the participant pool, particularly due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. Snowball sampling, as defined by Roberts (2014), utilizes a “chain-referral technique,” wherein participants refer others within their social networks who meet the recruitment criteria. This method was particularly useful during the pandemic when traditional means of recruiting participants were constrained by mobility and technological limitations. I started by asking friends, neighbors, and acquaintances to recommend potential respondents, which enabled me to reach men from various socioeconomic backgrounds and employment statuses.

While I initially aimed to use quota sampling to ensure representation across different classes and age brackets, I did not predefine specific quotas for each category. Instead, my primary focus was to ensure a diverse sample reflective of varying masculinities and pandemic experiences. As such, the recruitment process can best be described as a combination of purposive and convenience sampling since I primarily relied on my personal network and their referrals to recruit respondents who were willing and available to participate.

In total, I interviewed thirteen (13) Filipino men, as shown in Table 1. They all reside in Manila. Their ages range from 18 to 59 years old, with the majority in the age range of 30 to 49 years old. Class representation is diverse, covering low-, middle-, and high-income groups, with

most participants belonging to the middle-income class. I based these groupings on a study from the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (Albert et al. 2020), which defined a middle-income class of a family of five as earning between Php 23,000 and Php 140,000 in 2018 - later adjusted to Php 25,000 to Php 150,000 due to the economic impacts of the pandemic. In addition to the occupations mentioned during the interviews, several participants also detailed how they sought alternative sources of income and livelihood during the crisis (which I call their 'pandemic occupation'). Some relied on freelance projects (Ramon and Erwin), online selling of goods (Jeff, Robert, Franco, and Mark), home gardening (Kyle), and other sideline jobs such as being a truck driver and tattoo artist (Jimbet) and shipper (*kargador*) and tricycle driver (Jun).

Table 1. Profile of Respondents

Code Name	Age Bracket	Class	Occupation
Raf	18-29	C	Psychotherapy Officer
Isaac	18-29	C	Microbiology Scientist
Mike	18-29	C	Teacher
Jeff	30-39	A/B	Lawyer
Ramon	30-39	C	Art Director
Erwin	30-39	C	Doctor
Kyle	30-39	D/E	Security Guard
Robert	40-49	A/B	Chief Finance Officer
Enrico	40-49	C	Bank Employee
Franco	40-49	C	Room Attendant
Jun	40-49	D/E	Barangay Councilor
Robin	40-49	D/E	Tricycle Driver
Mark	50-59	C	Overseas Filipino Worker

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using memoing, coding, and thematic analysis, guided by Connell's (1995) framework on masculinities. This framework views hegemonic masculinity as not necessarily the most prevalent form of masculinity in practice but as the idealized version, often aspired to by men within a given social context. In this study, I conceptualized hegemonic masculinity as the dominant ideal that men seek to embody despite the challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Connell's work emphasizes that this form of masculinity maintains its dominance through relations of power with other masculinities, which are either marginalized or subordinated.

To operationalize hegemonic and subordinated masculinities in the context of this research, I drew on Yang's (2020) insights, which emphasize that hegemonic masculinity operates within a broader ecology of masculinities, where masculinity is constructed through both domination and consent, with other forms of masculinity either complicit with or subordinated by the hegemonic form. This helped identify subordinated masculinities – those that are actively oppressed or stigmatized – that may aspire to be hegemonic ideals but are prevented from fully participating due to factors like class or age. By coding the data, I traced how these power relations manifested in the narratives, focusing on how masculinities are socially constructed through hierarchies.

Limitations

I recognize the limitations of this study within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to mobility and health restrictions, most respondents came from

nearby communities in Manila and were referred by friends and colleagues. That respondents belong to the Manila urban setting and mostly come from the middle class could affect the “kind” of masculinities posed in this research and the ways in which the city is hardly hit by the pandemic (Broño 2021). Meanwhile, the virtual interview setup also limited spatial interactions, and this could also pose a factor in their openness to discussing the topic at hand.

The following sections delve into the themes that emerged from the analysis, illustrating how Filipino men navigated the dynamics of hegemonic and subordinated masculinities during the COVID-19 pandemic. By organizing the narratives around key themes identified through coding, this study presents a nuanced exploration of Filipino masculinity, shaped by both societal expectations and individual experiences.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study explores how Filipino men make meaning of and perform their masculinities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a constructivist framework, the research considers the dynamic interplay between multiple forms of masculinities within the Philippine context. Specifically, it highlights the negotiation between hegemonic masculinity – the dominant and idealized form of masculinity – and subordinated masculinities, which are often marginalized or oppressed, as conceptualized by Connell (1995). Through this lens, I examine how Filipino men construct their identities as men, navigating societal expectations and adjusting their behaviors to either align with or resist these ideals during the unique circumstances of the pandemic.

The coding process and thematic analysis, informed by Connell's understanding of hegemonic and subordinated masculinities, revealed how pandemic conditions influenced traditional masculine roles and led to the emergence of negotiated forms of masculinities. These themes align with previous studies by Rubio and Green (2009) and Valledor-Lukey (2012), which describe Filipino masculinity as rooted in family orientation and strength. However, these studies show how these traditionally masculine traits were reworked during the pandemic into what can be seen as a (re)claimed masculinity – a set of renegotiated traits adapted to the challenges of economic uncertainty, domestic pressures, and evolving societal conditions. The succeeding sections delve into these emergent themes, illustrating how Filipino men reconciled aspirational masculinities with the realities of the pandemic, offering insights into how masculinities are continuously redefined in response to crises.

HEGEMONIC MASCULINITIES

In the interviews, I explored participants' reflections on their idealized visions of manhood during the pandemic, focusing on their responsibilities, expectations, and the quintessential traits of a man. This section examines how hegemonic masculinity is manifested in these reflections, organized using Connell's (1995) theorizing. I conceptualized hegemonic masculinity not only as an ideal but also through the responsibilities and experiences that men performed at home and at work during the pandemic. These actions helped reveal how men aligned with or resisted societal expectations of Filipino masculinity. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) describe hegemonic masculinity, it is the "currently most honored way of being a man," requiring men to position themselves in relation to it, either by striving to achieve it or being subordinated by it.

The manifestations of hegemonic masculinity found in this study parallel earlier research on Filipino masculinity, particularly those described by Rubio and Green (2009), Valledor-Lukey (2012), and Aguilin-Dalisay et al. (2010). Idealized Filipino masculinity remains characterized by family-orientedness, a strong sense of responsibility, and *tibay ng loob* (strength of will). However, the pandemic context reshaped these traits, revealing both continuity and adaptation.

Three key themes of hegemonic masculinity emerged from the narratives: family-oriented, emphasizing men's roles as protectors and providers in the family; *madiskarte*, resourcefulness and adaptability, showcasing their ability to navigate difficult circumstances; and *matibay ang loob* (strength of will), symbolizing the need to be resilient in the face of adversities. While these traits align with previous studies on Filipino masculinity, the pandemic context highlighted how these idealizations of being a man were renegotiated and redefined as men adapted to heightened economic, social, and emotional pressures.

Family-oriented

The pandemic posed significant threats and challenges to Filipino men, prompting them to prioritize the security and safety of their families. Among the respondents, family-orientedness emerged as a dominant theme, with men emphasizing their roles as overseer, protector, disciplinarian, and role model. These responsibilities, while long-standing in Filipino culture, took on heightened importance during the crisis. Enrico, a married man with no kids, reflected on this, stating, "[Y]ung *matibay ang loob na lalaki na ang unang iisipin ay yung pamilya, kaya kailangan kumita dahil meron siyang pamilya na kailangan i-provide*" (A courageous man will

think of his family first; it's necessary to earn because he has a family to feed).

His words illustrate the deep-rooted expectation for men to be primary providers – a role that becomes even more critical in times of crisis, where economic and physical security are threatened. However, what sets the pandemic context apart is the intensification of this role, where men's identities as providers and protectors became more prominent due to the uncertainties surrounding work and health. For instance, Isaac, a 22-year-old fresh graduate, echoed similar concerns despite not being a father.

He explained, "*Kailangan mong protektahan 'yung family, mag-ingat na lumabas, Mag-ingat sa paglabas so kailangan dapat nagre-remind na, 'uy, mag-mask ka.*" (You need to protect the family, be careful when you go out. Be careful when you go out, so you need to remind them, 'Hey, wear a mask.')

This reveals an intergenerational sharing of masculine responsibilities. Young men like Isaac were taking on roles traditionally associated with older family members, such as protector and disciplinarian, by reminding family members to observe health protocols. This shift highlights how the pandemic reshaped the enactment of masculinity, expanding traditional roles across age brackets. The urgency of maintaining the family's health and security meant that even younger men who might not typically be seen as heads of households stepped into these roles, adapting to the crisis.

Madiskarte (Resourceful and Adaptable)

During the pandemic, the respondents demonstrated a strong reliance on *diskarte* – a culturally valued trait of resourcefulness and adaptability in times of difficulties.

Among the respondents, *diskarte* emerged as a survival mechanism, as men navigated unstable economic conditions and shifting family responsibilities. Ramon, a 36-year-old art director, highlighted how his work transitioned to a virtual setup. Despite these changes, when asked about his ideal traits of a man during the pandemic, he noted: "*Gagawa at gagawa ng paraan para matapos ang trabaho niya, para makaprovide para sa pamilya niya at hindi masama ang ginagawa*" (He will always find a way to finish his work, provide for his family, and do nothing bad in the process). This statement reflects not only Ramon's adaptability but also his relentless commitment to supporting his family amidst the challenges of the pandemic.

Ramon's experience underscores how adaptability became closely tied to his responsibilities as a family man, reflecting the broader cultural expectation that men must prioritize economic stability for their families. Similarly, Jun, a Barangay Councilor and part-time tricycle driver, demonstrated *diskarte* in more challenging circumstances. When asked about the ideal traits of men during the pandemic, he remarked, "*Abilidad sa panahon. Walang hiya-hiya.*" (Then you need resourcefulness for the times. No room for shame.) This highlights how men from lower-income backgrounds had to push past pride and embrace whatever means were necessary to support their families, even if it meant taking jobs they considered to be beneath them. As Jun reflected on delivering goods during the pandemic, he noted:

Dati akong umoorder, tapos ako ngayon ang magdedeliver. Parang apak sa ego mo yun. Pag pamilyado ka na, iba na kasi. Wala na sa barkada, wala na sa mga sasabihin ng tao. Doon na sa sasabihin ng mag-ina mo" (I used to order, now I'm the one delivering. It's like a blow to your ego. But when

you have a family, things change. It's not about your friends anymore or what others say—it's about what your wife and child think).

For men like Jun, *diskarte* required not only adaptability but also the willingness to sacrifice personal pride in the face of economic hardship. This ability to “make things work” reinforced traditional gender roles of being the provider, even when faced with diminished job opportunities. Despite the changing economic landscape, many respondents upheld the expectation of being resourceful and resilient, highlighting the intersection of economic provision and masculinity. This aligns with previous work on Filipino masculinity by Church, Katigbak, and Castañeda (1984-1985), which underscores the cultural expectation for men to embody hard work and moral conviction in providing for their families.

Class and economic status further shaped how men expressed *diskarte*. Ramon's relatively smoother transition to virtual work as an art director contrasts with Jun's reliance on manual labor, which was more significantly disrupted. Yet, both men displayed a willingness to adjust to new realities, with Ramon leveraging online platforms and Jun accepting jobs that challenged his previous sense of pride. This flexibility reflects the broader resilience required during the pandemic, as Filipino men navigated their roles as protectors and providers despite the socioeconomic challenges they faced.

Matibay ang Loob (Strong-Willed)

During the pandemic, the respondents expressed a strong reliance on *tibay ng loob* – the strength of will to endure hardships. Many participants viewed the

pandemic as both a crisis and a challenge to overcome, where acceptance of their circumstances was the first step. Mark, an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW), was forced to return home after losing his job abroad. To help his family, he worked alongside his wife, delivering home-cooked meals. Reflecting on his experience and advising his former shipmates struggling with financial difficulties, Mark said: "*Sabi ko kailangan ng pasensya, tsaka prayers lang yan number one. Yun yung advice ko sa kanila kasi wala ka nang magagawa eh*" (I told them you need patience, and prayers are number one. That's my advice because there's nothing more you can do).

Mark's narrative highlights a combination of acceptance and action – a dual approach where men first reconcile themselves with their lack of control over the pandemic and then take action through faith or practical efforts to support their families. This blend of spiritual and practical resilience embodies the hegemonic masculine ideal of facing challenges head-on while maintaining a sense of duty. Even in the face of adversity, Mark's adaptability in delivering food to support his family underscores the Filipino man's responsibility to provide and protect, reflecting the values of family-orientedness, *diskarte*, and *tibay ng loob*.

Similarly, *tibay ng loob* was expressed in emotional and psychological terms. Mike, an online English tutor and caretaker for his younger siblings after their parents passed away, shared the importance of maintaining emotional control: "*You have to also persevere and maintain 'yung calmness kasi 'pag ikaw mismo pinakita mo na may problema, baka mag-worry din sila para sa'yo*" (You have to persevere and maintain calmness because if you show that you're struggling, they might worry about you). This reflects how men are expected to conceal emotional vulnerability "to protect" their loved ones from stress. Mike's experience underscores

the societal pressure on men to display emotional and psychological strength, even in the face of personal hardships.

Respondents also associated *tibay ng loob* with resilience and perseverance, often using cultural symbols like the Barangay Ginebra basketball team's catchphrase "Never Say Die" to describe their refusal to give up despite the challenges of the pandemic. This cultural reference demonstrates how Filipino men draw on communal narratives of toughness to inspire themselves and their families to endure adversity. Men like Mark and Mike exemplify the expectation that they must stand firm in the face of difficulties, supported by faith and inner strength - although this pressure also comes at the cost of suppressing vulnerability, which is often viewed as incompatible with the hegemonic ideal of masculinity.

Narratives from the respondents illustrate how family-orientedness remained central to Filipino masculinity even during the COVID-19 pandemic, reinforcing the deeply ingrained expectation for men to serve as protectors and providers. As emphasized in the literature (Guthrie & Azores 1968; Licuanan 1979; Medina 2001), the focus on the family has long been a hallmark of Filipino masculinity, and the pandemic context amplified this expectation. The men interviewed also highlighted *diskarte* and *tibay ng loob* as key masculine traits that became crucial in the face of economic instability and health concerns.

Moreover, *diskarte* became a key mechanism for survival during the pandemic, with men from different economic backgrounds employing various strategies to meet their families' needs. For some, like Ramon, the transition to virtual work was manageable, while others, like Jun, faced more drastic disruptions but still displayed the

capacity to adapt. Similarly, *tibay ng loob* surfaced as both a personal and communal form of resilience, reflecting how Filipino men drew on their inner strength and social expectations to persevere. Hence, these narratives show how the pandemic reshaped but did not displace the core elements of hegemonic masculinity, with the family at the center and *diskarte* and *tibay ng loob* defining ideal traits in response to the crisis.

SUBORDINATED MASCULINITIES

Throughout the interviews, I explored how participants characterized men who were perceived as falling short of the idealized or hegemonic standards of masculinity during the pandemic. This section focuses on the development of subordinated masculinities, drawing from Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) concept of marginalized or subordinated forms of masculinity. Viewing hegemonic and subordinated masculinities relationally, I define subordinated masculinities as those that deviate from hegemonic norms and are often perceived as "weak" or "lacking."

This analysis is further guided by Valledor-Lukey's (2012) multidimensional characterization of Filipino masculinity, which outlines not only the positive but also the negative traits often attributed to Filipino men. While the negative aspects of Rubio and Green's framework were not directly mirrored in this study, they provide an important context for understanding the cultural treatment of certain behaviors as less masculine. During the interviews, I focused on the respondents' reflections on men who were not looked up to during the pandemic – those who struggled to meet expectations in terms of responsibilities, roles, and work. These individuals, whether facing unemployment or personal struggles, were perceived as falling short of the masculine ideal.

Subordinated masculinities, as discussed by participants, were seen to lack key qualities of hegemonic masculinity, including traits such as emotional vulnerability, economic instability, or failure to fulfill familial duties. Men who failed to meet the hegemonic expectations were criticized and viewed as less masculine. As Yang (2020) emphasizes, these marginalized masculinities exist within a broader hierarchy, where dominant forms of masculinity are upheld through social consent. In this context, the rejection of subordinated masculinities during the pandemic reinforced the hegemonic ideals of being family-oriented, *madiskarte*, and *matibay ang loob*. The narratives further revealed how men viewed those who failed to meet these expectations as embodying the “negative” or weaker traits of masculinity, which also intersect with class and psychosocial struggles.

Mahina ang Loob (Weak-Willed)

In the interviews, emotional vulnerability was frequently discussed as a trait associated with *mahina ang loob* (weak-willed), often perceived as a form of weakness among men. When asked about how he thinks some men faced the pandemic, Sydney remarked that most men managed to endure the crisis through a strong “mindset.” However, he also acknowledged that around “10%” of men might have been what he described as weak and overwhelmed, as he explained: “*Tulad nang kung tinamaan ka nga, nagiging malungkutin at depressed [ka] dahil malayo sa pamilya*” (Like when you get hit by it, you become sad and depressed because you’re far from your family). Sydney’s comments reflect how emotional struggles, such as sadness or depression, are stigmatized and viewed as signs of a weakened masculine identity during crises like the pandemic. These emotions, which are often treated as vulnerabilities, clash with the societal expectations of

Filipino masculinity that emphasize *tibay ng loob*.

This theme of vulnerability as weakness was echoed by Raf, a Psychotherapy Officer, who observed among men: “*I think that’s something na hindi masculine—to seek help*” (I think that’s something that’s not masculine—to seek help). This internalized perception of masculinity discourages men from openly acknowledging their emotional struggles, reinforcing the belief that emotional expression is incompatible with the masculine ideal. As a result, vulnerability is seen not only as a failure to meet societal expectations but also perceived by men as a devaluation of their own masculinity. Raf’s insight reveals how the pressure to conform to hegemonic ideals discourages men from seeking emotional support, further entrenching the stigma around mental health and emotional expression among Filipino men during the pandemic.

Moreover, these feelings of inadequacy were shared by Ramon, an art director who developed a panic disorder during the pandemic. Although he didn’t explicitly link his mental health struggles to a crisis of his masculinity, his narrative revealed a deep disappointment in his inability to fulfill his family responsibilities. He reflected on how his disorder left him unable to perform daily tasks, saying, “*Minsan para bang nadedepress na ‘ano ba ‘yan, bakit ganun, bakit nangyari ito sa akin. ‘Di ako makalabas, kailangan kong bumili ng ganito, kailangan ng anak ko ng ganito*” (Sometimes I feel depressed, thinking, ‘What is this? Why did this happen to me? I can’t go out; I need to buy things for my family, for my child, and I can’t’). Ramon’s frustration stems not only from his illness but from the disruption it caused in his ability to provide and take care of his family, reflecting how hegemonic masculinity places immense pressure on men to fulfill specific roles, even when confronted with mental health challenges.

In analyzing these accounts, it becomes evident that emotional vulnerability – though a distinct experience – ultimately ties back to the broader expectations of hegemonic masculinity, especially regarding familial duties. Men like Ramon, who struggled with mental health issues, were burdened not only by their conditions but also by the perception that they had failed to live up to their roles as providers and protectors. The narratives suggest that the pandemic, while exacerbating emotional challenges, also highlighted the limitations of hegemonic masculinity, where emotional vulnerability is equated with failure. Yet, instead of challenging these ideals, as the respondents shared, they internalized these shortcomings, reinforcing the relational dynamics between hegemonic and subordinated masculinities.

Tamad (Lazy)

During the interviews, respondents commonly expressed disdain for men perceived as *tamad* (lazy) during the pandemic, particularly those who were seen as failing to fulfill their expected roles within the household. This failure to contribute, combined with an attitude of dependency and carelessness, was viewed as disappointing, especially in relation to the idealized image of a man who works hard and supports his family. In addition to the general stigma surrounding laziness, there was a notable intersection with class, with men from middle to upper socioeconomic backgrounds showing greater resentment toward able-bodied men who appeared dependent on government aid or charity.

For instance, Enrico, a bank employee, expressed frustration when asked about the kind of men he disapproved of during the pandemic:

"Siyempre, yung mga hindi nagtatrabaho, na natanggal sa trabaho tapos nag-stop na yung buhay nila dun, na malimos nalang, nasa kalye nalang, umaasa nalang sa hingi, pero ang lalaki ng katawan" (Of course, those who don't work, who were laid off and their lives just stopped after that, those who beg for alms, live on the streets, and rely on handouts, even though they have big, strong bodies).

Enrico's sentiment reflects the idea that men, regardless of their circumstances, are expected to demonstrate *diskarte* even in the face of adversity. The pressure to embody this ideal of *diskarte* reinforces the notion that men should be able to find solutions to their problems, regardless of external conditions. This view tends to hegemonize resourcefulness, positioning it as a masculine trait that separates "successful" men from those deemed inferior or lazy. However, this perspective often disregards the structural inequalities that affect men's ability to find work or income sources during a crisis.

This contrast becomes stark when compared to the experience of Robin, a tricycle driver who lost his source of income during the pandemic. He shared: *"Mahirap. Namomroblema kami kung paano kami kakain. Umaasa na lang kami sa binibigay na ayuda. Pinagkakasya lang po yun"* (It's difficult. We worry about how we'll eat. We just depend on aid from the government. We just try to make it fit). Robin's account illustrates how men from lower socioeconomic backgrounds experienced the pandemic differently, relying on government assistance for survival yet still struggling to meet basic needs. The pressure for men to find work and be financially responsible clashed with the economic realities they faced, amplifying feelings of inadequacy for those who couldn't meet these societal expectations.

The difference in their narratives reveals how economic disparities shape men's experiences and responses to the pandemic, creating a tension between idealized masculine roles and the realities faced by different socioeconomic groups. The inability to meet these expectations led to internalized feelings of failure, as societal norms prioritized the ideal of men as proactive breadwinners, even in situations where opportunities for work were scarce.

Matigas ang ulo (Stubbornness)

The theme of being *matigas ang ulo* (stubbornness) emerged prominently in the respondents' descriptions of men who disregarded health protocols during the pandemic. This trait was heavily criticized, particularly in the context of protecting one's family. Kyle, a security guard in a condominium, expressed frustration with men who refused to comply with safety measures: "*Yung matigas ang ulo. Siyempre, pagka-sinabi mag-face mask at face shield ka, yung iba, wala lang. Parang dekorasyon lang kung tawagin. Hindi sumusunod sa protocol*" (When they're told to wear a face mask and face shield, some people treat it like it's just a decoration. They don't follow the protocol.) Here, stubbornness reflects an unwillingness to take responsibility, which is considered a failure to fulfill masculine duties of protection, particularly in the context of the pandemic.

Stubbornness, in another case, is framed not just as a personal flaw but as a direct threat to family welfare. Jake, a work-from-home lawyer during the pandemic, highlighted the risks of attending large gatherings during the pandemic:

"Yung pabaya... lumalabas pa rin... pupunta sa malalaking gathering... posibleng mag-cause ng

problems or trouble dun sa family, siyempre pag nainfect dadalhin pa sa hospital, maexpose yung mga family members" (Those who are careless and still go out, attending large gatherings... it could cause trouble for the family, because if they get infected, they'll bring it home and expose family members).

In this sense, *matigas ang ulo* is not only about individual risk-taking but is viewed through a familial lens, where the failure to comply with safety protocols could endanger loved ones. The criticism of stubbornness was further reinforced by the militarized enforcement of health protocols during the pandemic. As Tomacruz and Magsambol (2022) note, the Philippine government's COVID-19 protocols were often enforced with strict and punitive measures, framing non-compliance as a civic and moral failing. While it's difficult to definitively state how much this militaristic approach directly influenced men's perceptions, it's reasonable to speculate that the strict enforcement of health protocols likely shaped how non-compliance was viewed. Men may have associated carelessness and irresponsibility - often called *pasaway* - with a failure in masculine responsibility, particularly when family health and safety were at risk. Thus, stubbornness potentially became a marker of deviant masculinity - perceived as a violation of hegemonic ideals of responsibility and protectiveness.

In a broader context, this reflects the persistent centrality of family in Filipino masculinity. Men who were described as stubborn during the pandemic not only defied societal rules but also failed to protect their families—an essential component of Filipino masculine identity. The focus on adherence to health protocols in this context highlights how men's roles as protectors were scrutinized, and their failure to protect the family from the virus was equated with a failure to perform their masculine duties. As such, *matigas ang ulo* serves as a subordinated masculinity,

further deviating from the hegemonic ideals of family-oriented responsibility and *tibay ng loob*.

The findings of this study reaffirm the relational dynamic between hegemonic masculinity and subordinated masculinities, highlighting the ongoing tension between the two. Subordinated masculinities often experience marginalization because they deviate from the hegemonic standards of family-orientedness, *diskarte*, and *matibay ang loob*. However, this also reveals the limitations of hegemonic masculinity in acknowledging broader social realities and conditions. For example, among lower-income men, *diskarte* cannot always overcome systemic challenges such as unemployment, making it difficult to meet the hegemonic expectation of being the family provider. Similarly, men struggling with psychological challenges like depression find it equally challenging to embody the trait of *matibay ang loob*, showing that emotional resilience is not simply a matter of choice but is impacted by deeper mental health struggles. These obstacles hinder men from fulfilling the societal expectation of prioritizing their families as they face their own internal and external battles.

Moreover, these marginalized masculinities can be better understood through the lens of Filipino masculinity as multidimensional, featuring both positive and negative characteristics, as highlighted by Valledor-Lukey (2012). Within the context of the pandemic, traits such as emotional vulnerability (*mahina ang loob*), arrogance (*mayabang*), carelessness (*padalus-dalos*), and stubbornness (*matigas ang ulo*) were considered negative, subordinated qualities. In contrast, the positive traits – family-orientedness, *madiskarte*, and *matibay ang loob* – aligned with hegemonic masculinity. This duality underscores the complexity of Filipino masculinities, especially in times of crisis, as men are compelled to navigate competing expectations while confronting social and psychological barriers.

(RE)CLAIMING MASCULINITIES

In this section on (re)claiming masculinities, I aim to highlight the particular justifications and motivations that drive men's adherence to certain masculine ideals during the pandemic. These ideals are shaped by the tension between hegemonic and marginalized masculinities, such as *madiskarte* versus *tamad* and *matibay ang loob* versus *mahina ang loob*. As shown in earlier discussions, this tension is rooted in economic and psychological differences, with family-oriented traits often occupying a central role. Here, I emphasize how these masculine ideals not only serve as points of contrast between men but also create hierarchical relationships between men and other genders, reflecting broader systems of gender subordination.

One illustration of this gendered dynamic is the role of the "frontliner," a self-sacrificial figure whose actions are shaped not solely by personal ideals of heroism but also by the belief that men are responsible for protecting women. Jeff, for example, articulated this notion, stating:

"Lumalabas yung mga men para kasi sila yung ano eh, yung para hindi na maabala yung mga babae o hindi maput-at-risk yung mga women sa family... kasi 'di ba normally 'pag sa household yung babae yung nag-aayos doon" (Men go out so they won't inconvenience women or to avoid putting the women in the family at risk... because normally, it's the woman who handles household tasks).

This statement reveals how men justified their roles in terms of shielding women from external dangers, reinforcing the traditional belief that women should remain in the domestic sphere while men bear the burden of external risks.

Similarly, the ideal of *matibay ang loob* was also framed in gendered terms, with the respondents drawing strength from the notion that they must surpass the resilience of women. Jun's perspective encapsulates this, as he explained:

"Kaya siguro isa na rin yun [kaisipan na lalaki ay mas malakas sa babae] sa nagpapalakas sa kanila. 'Si ate nga kinaya, ako pa kayang lalaki. Edi mas lalo.'" (I think that's one of the reasons [belief that men are stronger than women] that strengthens them. 'If my older sister was able to do it, even more so should I as a man').

Here, resilience becomes a competitive trait between genders, where men feel compelled to outdo women's emotional and psychological fortitude. This dynamic highlights how gender comparisons serve to justify the men's perceived need to suppress vulnerability and push through hardships.

Finally, the expectation of being *madiskarte* is also tied to gendered roles. Robin, a tricycle driver, pointed out that men bear the responsibility of providing for the family, noting:

"Sa babae, siguro lalo yung asawa 'di naman gaano siguro silang masyadong ano, kasi yung lalaki talaga yung namomroblema eh kung saan kukuha ng makakain, saan kukuha ng pambili-bili ng kape, sabon..." (For women, especially wives, they might not worry as much, because it's the man who really worries about where to get food, where to get money to buy coffee, soap).

This emphasizes the persistent gendered division of labor, with men feeling the primary pressure to secure financial resources. The trait of *madiskarte*, therefore, is not merely

about being adaptable but also about embodying the traditional masculine burden of providing for the family, reinforcing the societal expectation that men shoulder the economic responsibility and fortifying the belief that economic survival is primarily a male domain.

Thus, the process of (re)claiming masculinities during the pandemic reflects the negotiation between traditional gender expectations and the socio-economic challenges faced by men. The ideals of being *madiskarte* and *matibay ang loob* were not just personal goals but were deeply intertwined with maintaining patriarchal structures, reinforcing male dominance both within their households and society. Through these justifications, men reaffirmed their roles as providers and protectors, drawing strength from their perceived superiority over women while reinforcing the belief that economic and emotional resilience are primarily male responsibilities.

Conclusion

Narratives from the respondents illustrate how family-orientedness remained central to Filipino masculinity even during the COVID-19 pandemic, reinforcing the deeply ingrained expectation for men to serve as protectors and providers. Despite economic or personal challenges, Filipino men were expected to prioritize their families, maintaining their roles as the primary earners and decision-makers in times of crisis. This affirms the lasting influence of family-centered masculinity, even as the pandemic reshaped the contexts in which men performed their traditional roles.

The findings of this study reaffirm the relational dynamic between hegemonic masculinity and subordinated masculinities, highlighting the ongoing tension between the two. Subordinated masculinities often experience

marginalization because they deviate from the hegemonic standards of family-orientedness, *diskarte*, and *matibay ang loob*. However, this also reveals the limitations of hegemonic masculinity in acknowledging broader social realities and conditions. For lower-income men, *diskarte* could not always overcome systemic challenges like unemployment, while psychological struggles hindered others from embodying *matibay ang loob*. These obstacles prevented men from fully fulfilling societal expectations, showing that masculinity is constrained by economic and mental health realities.

These findings echo those of previous studies on Filipino masculinity, underscoring its multidimensional nature and adaptability Valledor-Lukey (2012). However, they also expose the power dynamics inherent in the gender order, as Hearn et al. (2023) emphasize. The process of (re)claiming masculinities during the pandemic not only reinforced traditional masculine ideals but also perpetuated the “hegemony of men,” where masculinity remains dominant over subordinated masculinities and other genders, reinforcing societal hierarchies.

While Filipino masculinity during the pandemic was contested and reworked, it remained resilient and dynamic. This study contributes to broader conversations on Filipino masculinity by demonstrating that while men adapted to the challenges of the pandemic, they continued to navigate within a framework of gendered power relations, maintaining both individual and collective dominance.

This study offers valuable insights on engaging men in gender conversations, recognizing their key role in reshaping hegemonic masculinities and acting as allies in challenging gendered power relations, particularly within social institutions like the family. As we surface and unpack men’s narratives and expressions of

masculinities, it becomes crucial to adopt critical and reflective research approaches and programs cognizant of the subtle forms of masculinities that oppress other genders, as emphasized in the last section. These forms of oppression also underscore the intersectionality of the problem, spanning class, culture, and various other contexts.

By actively involving men in these discussions, we can better challenge the dominance of hegemonic masculinities and promote more inclusive and equitable gender relations, even among men. Moreover, programs that encourage men to develop a broader understanding of their masculinities and reimagine these identities beyond traditional notions should be strongly advocated. These initiatives can foster traits that men often struggle with, such as vulnerability, emotional expression, and shared responsibility in both familial and societal roles, while being sensitive to the pressure to conform or aspire to dominant ideals of masculinity, such as "*tunay na lalaki*."

This shift empowers men to redefine their masculine identities in healthier and more open ways, particularly in their relationships with other genders. Ultimately, this reimagination can liberate men from the pressures of hegemonic masculinities and the harmful expectations imposed by the patriarchal society on both themselves and the other genders it oppresses.

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