ERASMUS MUNDUS MASTER

IN WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES

An integrative approach to understand constitutive forces in the emerging Bear culture of São Paulo: the field of masculinity and gender capital

M. A. Thesis

Author: José Luís Gomez Gonzalez Júnior

Main supervisor: Eszter Timar - Central European University

Support supervisor: Liamar Durán Almarza - Universidad de Oviedo

Budapest, September 2012

Acknowledgments

I thank all the participants who were interviewed for this research.

I gratefully acknowledge my supervisors Eszter Timar and Liamar Durán Almarza, for the

intense support and insightful comments during the whole process of writing this thesis.

I am grateful to the GEMMA Program for making possible this unique experience.

I would like to thank my family, Daniel, Luis Javier, Sarah, Carmen, Pavla, and Rebekka.

Abstract

The Bear culture in Brazil started to flourish in the second half of the 1990s and it has been growing ever since, but what are the constitutive forces of this emerging culture? That is precisely the research question of this thesis. Based on the theoretical model of the field of masculinity by Coles (2008) and the concept of gender capital by Bridges (2009), the aim of this thesis is to develop an integrative approach to understand constitutive forces in the emerging Bear culture of São Paulo, the most important city of the Bear scene in Brazil. This research was based on fieldwork with eleven members of the Bear community of São Paulo. By presenting a specific form of gender capital, this study demonstrated that Bears adequately illustrate what Coles (2008) argued that some men's "lived experiences of masculinity were not of being subordinated or marginalized by hegemonic masculinity; to the contrary, they considered their own masculinity to be dominant despite being incompatible with, or varying from, the hegemonic ideal" (p. 234). Their attitude (such as "going natural" and "masculine behaviour"), bodily characteristics (such as body hair, Bear belly and being stocky) and elements of the Bearphernalia (such as jeans, checked shirts, caps and boots) provide Bears with valuable capital not only within the subfields of Bear and gay masculinity, but also in the field of masculinity.

Resumen

La cultura Bear en Brasil comenzó a florecer en la segunda mitad de la década de 1990 y ha estado creciendo desde entonces, pero ¿cuáles son las fuerzas constitutivas de esta cultura emergente? Esa es precisamente la pregunta de esta tesis. Basado en el modelo teórico "the field of mascunility" (Coles, 2008) y el concepto "gender capital" (Bridges, 2009), el objetivo de esta tesis es desarrollar un enfoque integrador para comprender las fuerzas constitutivas de la cultura Bear de São Paulo, la ciudad más importante de la escena Bear en Brasil. Esta investigación se basó en el trabajo de campo con once miembros de la comunidad Bear de São Paulo. Presentando una forma específica de "gender capital", este estudio demostró que los Bears adecuadamente ilustran lo que Coles (2008) argumenta, que "algunas experiencias vividas de la masculinidad no son de subordinación o marginación por la masculinidad hegemónica, por el contrario, estos hombres consideraban que su propia masculinidad era la dominante a pesar de ser incompatible con el ideal hegemónico "(p. 234). Sus actitudes (por ejemplo, "going natural" y "un comportamiento masculino"), las características corporales (tales como el pelo del cuerpo, el vientre Bear y ser rechoncho) y los elementos de la Bearphernalia (tales como pantalones vaqueros, camisas a cuadros, gorras y botas) proporcionan a los Bears un valioso capital no sólo dentro de los "subfields of Bear and gay masculinity", sino también en "the field of masculinity".

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

"Here comes the teddy bear of the club!" was the utterance made by the hostess of one of the biggest gay clubs in São Paulo for welcoming a man who was just arriving there. The words "teddy bear" mentioned in that statement were not related to the fact that this newcomer was cute or sweet, but rather to his physical attributes: a man whose body was big and hairy. The bodily characteristics of the newcomer were neatly noticed by the hostess probably because the majority of the attendees of that club were *barbies*, a term often used within São Paulo's gay community to refer to gay men who have a muscular and toned body (França, 2007). Despite other meanings the statement "Here comes the teddy bear of the club!" could have had, it is relevant to draw attention to the fact that it indicates that a different person from the majority of the attendees of the club was arriving there; a teddy bear (mis)placed in a *barbies'* space. Besides making evident that the newcomer was different from the regular attendees of the club, that statement also assigned a designation to him; it expressed that the newcomer had some physical attributes that are characteristic of another gay subculture, namely, the Bears[1].

The Bear culture in Brazil started to flourish in the second half of the 1990s (*Ursos do Rio*, 2007) and it has been growing ever since, but what are the constitutive forces of this emerging culture? That is precisely the research question of this thesis. Based on the theoretical model of the field of masculinity by Coles (2008) and the concept of gender capital by Bridges (2009), which seek to better understand how the notions of masculinity are

---

[1] From now on, I will use the word Bear in capital letters when referring to it as a gay subculture; and the same word in lowercase referring to the animal bear.

1

reflected in men's lived experience, the aim of this thesis is to develop an integrative approach to understand constitutive forces in the emerging Bear culture of São Paulo, the most important city of the Bear scene in Brazil.

The present thesis is divided in six chapters. The first one, "Presenting the Bear community", seeks to explain what the definition of Bear may comprise; present the history of the Bear phenomenon; address issues of class, race, and inclusivity; describe the characteristic elements of the Bear community; and introduce the Bear culture in Brazil and in São Paulo. Subsequently, "Theoretical Framework" focuses on the explanation of the main concepts used to analyse the Bear culture: Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity; the Bourdieusian concepts of habitus, capital, and field; the theoretical model of the field of masculinity (Coles, 2008); and the concept of gender capital (Bridges, 2009). The third chapter, "Methodology", aims to present the importance of studying the Bear culture; position the methodology used in this study in the field of qualitative research; address ethical issues; and describe both the profile of the participants and the interview process. The "Interview Analysis" chapter seeks to present the results of the interviews with eleven members of the Bear community of São Paulo. "Masculinities within the Bear community", in turn, aims to reflect on and problematize the meanings masculinity has for Bears, more specifically in the Bear community in São Paulo. Finally, the last chapter presents the main conclusions of this research.

CHAPTER 1

PRESENTING THE BEAR COMMUNITY

> Part of the magic of the Bear label is that
> it escapes precise definition
>
> Monaghan, *Big handsome men, Bears and others*

1.1 How to define a Bear?

Defining a Bear is not an easy task. Hennen (2005), McCormick (2011), Monaghan (2005), Suresha (2002) and Wright (1997, 2001) all state that Bear does not have a unique meaning. Since this concept may have a different definition depending on each Bear group all over the world or even depending on each member of each community, rather than seeking to determine what a Bear is, it is important to approach usual definitions in order to grasp what this concept may cover. One of the most frequent images associated with Bears is a stocky gay or bisexual man with facial and bodily hair. Besides this, it is not unusual to find a definition of a Bear that also considers a very masculine[2] demeanor as an essential attribute, such as the description given by Bridges (2011) of "a group that celebrates a more rugged masculinity with diverse bodies and lots of hair" (p. 83).

It is also possible to find definitions of Bears associated with cuddling and characteristics of the same-name animal, "First and foremost [Bear] is a cuddly demeanor, followed by a cuddly body. Body or facial fur can be important, since they are some of a bear's identifying characteristics in the wild" (*Bears mailing list,* 1995). In addition to

---

[2] The masculine demeanour refers to men who have a rugged masculinity, in opposition to those who have "effeminate mannerisms". This is explained in detail in the chapter 5, "Masculinities within the Bear community".

physical characteristics, some other characteristics of the animal bear are also applied when defining a Bear, "Just the animal itself, you know it, big and masculine, and very aggressive, but very nice and gentle at times as well" (Baus & Hunt, 2008). Apart from these meanings, Bears can also be considered as just a "gay sexual icon of desirability" (Wright, 1997, p. 2) or as gay men "going natural" (Suresha, 2002), which is often associated with those men who do not care about fashion or aesthetics, wearing generally jeans and flannel shirts.

The American scholar Les K. Wright, who is the founder of the Bear History Project[3] and has two books on the history and the evolution of the Bear subculture (*The Bear book* and *The Bear book II*), presents a statement that suitably describes the problematic question of not having fixed criteria to define a Bear: "Each self-identifying Bear, over the last ten years, has filled in his own definition and meaning" (Wright, 1997, p. 2). He points out that, for some, Bears are gay men who challenge the ideal of beauty related to a toned, slim, and shaved body; and celebrate the fact that they are generally corpulent and hirsute. On the other hand, he also states that some consider Bears as "the absolute refusal to submit to categorization" (Wright, 1997, p. 2).

Although it would be possible to write a number of pages on different definitions of a Bear, the intention here is not to reach an ultimate truth, but rather to grasp usual meanings associated with this culture. The explanation gave by Martin (1997) provides us with a valuable insight to better understand the Bear phenomenon, "We are not dealing with a well-organized, members-only, card-carrying association, but instead the advent of a pervading spirit that is often more a shared personal experience" (p. xix). Thereby, rather than seeking to define whether someone is a Bear or not, this research is based on the premise that it is

---

[3] Les K. Wright founded the Bear History Project in 1994 in Boston. For more information of this matter see http://www.leskwright.com

worthy to draw attention to the fact that there are thousands of individuals in many countries who define themselves as Bears and, consequently, believe they share similar experiences with other members of this community.

Having given a brief explanation of some meanings related to the definition of a Bear, I turn now to some important aspects of the history of this community.

1.2 Bear History

Similar to the definition of a Bear that does not have a unique meaning; the history of the Bear community does not have a unique version. Again here, rather than seeking to attribute one single explanation to the emergence of the Bear phenomenon, it seems more appropriate to consider a variety of factors contributing to the formation of this community, as defended by Rofes (2002): "Subcultures are multifaceted realities" (p. 17).

One of the first groups of men who start to self-identify as Bears, according to Wright (1997), appeared in San Francisco in the mid-1980s. The advent of Bear communities is related mainly to two particular reasons, namely, the devastation of the AIDS epidemic in the gay community and the stereotypical image of gay men as "Castro clones"[4]. After the epidemic hit in the early 1980s, as argued by Wright (1997), the image of a thin man was often related to being sick or dying from AIDS; while being fat or gaining extra weight was associated with being healthy, uninfected. Thereby, the figure of a Bear, of someone who is stocky or overweight, became visible and, also, eroticized. Moreover, Bronski (2002) also

[4] The term "Castro clone" makes reference to the term "gay clone" and to the popularly known as the "gay neighbourhood" of San Francisco, the Castro District. According to Levine (1998): "By the end of the 1970s, the clone look was *the* [emphasis in original] look for the postcloset urban denizen of the gay ghetto" (p. 58). Thus, "Castro Clone" refers to the notion that gay men from Castro act and look alike.

points out an interesting fact regarding the correspondence between the emergence of the Bear community and the AIDS epidemic. Since AIDS was associated with urban life and gay, the "back-to- nature" appeal of the Bear community helped to create a fantasy of a non-infected place, "The result was a fantasy flight to the natural and the woods, and the non-urban" (Bronski, 2002, p. 31).

In addition to this, the emergence of the Bear community is also related to a response to the "Castro clone" gay stereotype, which seemed to consider gay men as a homogenous group and as an ideal to be achieved:

> The Bear subculture reflects a kind of reaction or backlash of men who look different from the cultural 'ideal'. When one-specific, Anglo-Nordic, WASPy[5] look dominates cultural images, what happens to other white ethnics who look different? Those other men – particularly Italian, Latino, and Eastern Europeans, who are not perceived as being as attractive as that blond, pretty-boy, good-looking type – seek to affirm themselves by creating alternatives to the mainstream culture. (Rofes, 2002, p. 18)

As demonstrated above, the sameness among gay men was not only related to the way they used to wear or behave, but also to similar physical attributes they seemed to have. Rofes (2002) considers that the eroticization of men who did not have these "mainstream" attributes – such as Italian, Latin, Eastern Europeans and I also include Bears – may also be understood as the "return of the repressed" (p. 18), which means something that had been rejected and removed from the scene that suddenly became desirable.

---

[5] WASP stands for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant.

Furthermore, Rofes (2002) brings out a valuable reflection on the advent of the Bear phenomenon. He explains that the gay community grew from a small group in the 1970s to an enormous one in the 1990s; and, as it occurs to other communities that get extremely big, gay community was divided and segmented. For him, Bears are one outcome of this segmentation, and the kind of masculinity valued by them is related to the profusion of men in the gay community and also to the importance gay men place to gender; "Bears had to happen because gender is a critical issue for gay men – as more men flooded into gay venues, more kinds of masculinities needed to become available and gay-ified" (Rofes, 2002, p. 17).

1.3 Bear nation, race, and inclusivity

The Bear community, as already mentioned, started to flourish in the mid-1980s and, since then, it has exponentially grown. Nowadays, there are groups of Bears not only in the United States, but also in many areas of Central and South America, Europe, New Zealand, Australia (Hennen, 2005), Turkey, Russia (Wright, 2005) and Japan (Shimko, 2002). Besides this, McCormick (2011) also points out the presence of Bear events in the Middle East, especially in Lebanon and Syria, where some tourism practices addressed to Bears have been taking place in the last few years. The importance and visibility this community has gained can be observed by the creation of a symbol to represent it, the International Bear Brotherhood flag (see *Figure 1* below). This flag comprises seven horizontal stripes of different colours – brown, orange, yellow, beige, white, grey, and black – and has an image of a bear paw in the upper left. According to resource websites for Bears (*History of the Bear flag,* 2004; *What is the Bear flag,* 2005), the Bear flag was developed by Craig Byrnes in

1995 with inclusivity in mind, and the different colours of the stripes indicate different fur colours and nationalities of the animal bear throughout the world.

Figure 1. International Bear Brotherhood flag. Copyright © 1995, Craig Byrnes.

Despite the fact that the flag seeks to represent inclusivity, it is not so usual to find non-white men within the Bear community[6]. Based on his fieldwork in a large city of the United States, Hennen (2005) argues that although the majority of the definitions of Bears do not take into account the skin colour, the Bear community "remains overwhelmingly white" (p. 31). At the same time, he also points out that many Bear organizations have a racially inclusive discourse and are making an effort to challenge the hierarchical ranking of races.

Besides this, another point worth mentioning regarding the inclusivity of the Bear community concerns the current debates on the possibility of having lesbians and transexual men among its members, as pointed out by Wright (2005), "Even the evolution of the umbrella of homegrown masculinity of '(gay male) bears' is being increasingly embraced by transbears (Mike Hernandez); ursulas, or lesbian bears (Tanya Gulliver); and male and female heterosexual bears" (p. 246). The possibility of the inclusion of lesbians and

---

[6] An analysis of the interplay of race and class is described in the section 1.4 "Marketability, Bearphernalia, and class".

transexual men has generated debates in the community and divided opinions. Some of those in favour defend the position that the very spirit of Bears is intrinsically related to include people. On the other hand, some who stand opposition argue that now that Bears finally found a space for themselves, it is not appropriate to include different members[7]. Based on these positions, it is possible to infer that at the same time that this community was founded also in order to provide a space for people who were not included in mainstream spaces, there is also a feeling of threat that this space might get jeopardized.

1.4 Marketability, Bearphernalia, and class

> You are a community or you are an identity
> when you are a niche market
>
> Baus & Hunt, *Bear Run*

The fact that heterosexual men and women, lesbians and transexuals are willing to take part in the Bear community as well as the presence of Bears in a number of countries indicate the major dimension this community has taken. Such a visibility has also been attracting commercial interest, confirming what Rofes (2002) stated, that there is not a formation of "identity and community in the contemporary world without commodification occurring" (p. 14). The commercial potential of the Bear community appears to be extensively explored, as it is possible to find countless events and products addressed to Bears, and even the use of a particular language, the "Bear slang" (Baus & Hunt, 2008).

---

[7] For more information of this debate, see Baus and Hunt (2008).

There are several events organized by the Bear community and they include a variety of types: parties, pool parties, camping weekends, lunches, meetings in bars, trips, among others. According to Baus and Hunt (2008), it is not uncommon that many men who like to take part in Bear events in the United States plan their vacations around some of these Bear events, such as the "International Bear Rendevouz", the "Bear Trek" called "Bears in the Jungle" and the contest "International Mr. Bear". One notable characteristic of the name of the events organized by the Bear community is the frequent presence of the word "Bear". In fact, this word is repeatedly used not only in the name of the events, but in almost everything related to this community. For example, the name of a Bear club in Barcelona is "BEARcelona"[8], a cruise trip addressed to Bears is a "Bear Cruise"[9], an event in Germany called "OktoBEARfest"[10], a weekend trip to Reykjavik called "Bears on Ice"[11], "Bear Arabia Summer Trip", "Bear Arabia International Weekend" and "Mr. Bear Arabia" (McCormick, 2011), "Sugar Bear Weekend" in Montreal (Baus & Hunt, 2008) and the "Bear Pride" (Wright, 1997).

The word "Bear" or any other word that makes reference to the universe of the Bear community very often makes part of the vocabulary of its members, which can even be called "Bear language" or "Bear slang" (Baus & Hunt, 2008). Having its own language, according to Wright (1997), is an indispensable feature for founding a community; and it seems that the Bear slang precisely confirms this statement. Some illustrative expressions are "Bear run", which is when a group of Bears get together and party, "big Bear hug", "Bear-a-oke", "Bear-b-que", "neighBear" (a Bear neighbour), "Bear soup" (a number of Bears in a swimming pool), "husBear" (a husband who is a Bear), "furgasm" (when two Bears have an orgasm)

---

[8] Retrieved 11 March, 2012, from http://www.bearcelona.org
[9] Ibid.
[10] Retrieved 11 March, 2012, from http://www.oktobearfest.de
[11] Retrieved 11 March, 2012, from http://www.bearsonice.org

and "cyBearspace" (Baus & Hunt, 2008). The Bear slang also includes a definition of different types of Bears, such as "marsupial Bears" (the ones from Australia, as cited in Bronski, 2002), "Asian Bears", "polar Bears" for the ones with grey hair; "otter" for a slender Bear, "cub" for a younger Bear, "muscle Bear" and "chubby Bear".

In addition to this, the Bear slang can also be found in the name given to describe the set of products addressed to the members of this community, the "Bearphernalia" (Wright, 1997). It includes magazines (*BEAR Magazine, American Bear, American Grizzly*)[12], books (*Tales from the Bear Cult, Bearerotica, the Bear Handbook)*[13], cups, buttons, patches, vest pins, shirts, watches, and rings. Most of them are emblazoned with the Bear flag colours or the image of a Bear. Baus and Hunt (2008), on their documentary on Bears in the United States of America, state that there are a number of clothing accessories that are representative of Bears, such as flannel checked shirts, suspender, jeans, caps and leather boots.

It is curious to notice that the image of Bears, including their type of clothes and the masculinity associated with them, is not directly related to the reality of many of them. Rofes (2002) states that the fantasy of a Bear is often drawn upon the image of a lumberjack in the woods, and that the ideal of masculinity within the Bear community is frequently related to working-class masculinity. Nevertheless, although this image is pervasive among Bears, curiously, a significant number of them do not live in the rural area and do not come from working-class, as Hennen (2005) explains: "Bears present an image of working-class masculinity, yet many, if not most, are middle class" (p. 30). The interaction of class and masculinity is elucidated by Barrett and Pollack (2005):

---

[12] As cited in Hennen (2005).
[13] Ibid.

11

In general, there is a cultural assumption that masculinity among working-class men is characterized as being less refined and more physical, expressed through relatively unsophisticated language and behaviors that are replete with demonstrations (verbal or physical) of strength, heterosexual prowess, and impatience with weakness. This working-class conception of masculinity is very distinct from the one promulgated in the middle class that is characterized as being more nuanced in its expression of strength and prowess, where demonstrations of a relatively emotional empathy are expected, and where language and behavior are expected to be more refined and negotiable in tone. (p. 440)

Being the Bear culture "a group that celebrates a more rugged masculinity" (Bridges, 2011, p. 83), it is plausible that its ideal of masculinity is associated with working-class, rather than middle class. Furthermore, the fact that the majority of members of the Bear community are middle class seems to illustrate the argument that "working-class bodies have long held an erotic fascination for the middle class" (Hennen, 2005, p. 31). Bears seem to be an appropriate example of the "middle-class eroticization of workingmen's bodies" (Rofes, 1997, p. 89).

On the other hand, working-class men are not only associated with a more rugged masculinity, but also with other Bear characteristics, such as stockiness and body hair[14]. "While large bodies suggest manual labor, furriness is most associated with certain ethnic strains – Irish, Italian, Armenian, Jewish, Scandinavian men. At the height of factory labor a hundred years ago, these ethnic groups *were* [emphasis in original] the poor immigrants" (Wright, 1997, p. 13). This quote makes reference to the reality of the U.S. and depicts the

---

[14] More details on the importance of body hair for Bears are explained in chapter 5 "Masculinities within the Bear community".

hairy immigrants of that time as working-class men, and their large bodies as a consequence of manual labor. From this quote, it is possible to apprehend that being hairy is most associated with white strains – Irish, Italian, Jewish, etc. Concerning the Bear culture, the intertwining of whiteness and body hair can be observed in the images used to symbolize Bears, such as Jack Radcliffe, one of the major *white* Bear icons (Wright, 2001). Furthermore, maybe the intertwining of whiteness and body hair, and the consequent image of Bears as white men, can also be indicative of the low number of non-white Bears in the community.

1.5 Bear community in Brazil and São Paulo

In order to present an estimated idea of the dimension of the Bear phenomenon in Brazil, and since there is no official data concerning Bears, in this section I will refer to data collected from a popular social network, *Facebook.* Due to the shortcomings of that information, such as the number of people who might not access the internet or not use *Facebook*, rather than represent the exact number of Bears, data provided here might indicate the popularity of the Bear phenomenon in various parts of the country. It was possible to observe groups of Bears of at least fourteen of the 26 states that form part of Brazil, namely, Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Curitiba, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo, Goiás, Piauí, Alagoas, Ceará, Pernambuco, Paraíba and Bahia. From the five regions that make part of the country (North, Northeast, Midwest, Southeast and South), it is possible to observe a major popularity of the Bear phenomenon in the Southeast (being São Paulo the most representative state, with 5629 members on the *Facebook* community), South (being Paraná the most representative state, with 1405 members) and Northeast (being Bahia

13

the most representative state, with 1106 members[15]). Besides this, it is also possible to observe online Bear communities in the Midwest (e.g., in Brasília and Goiás[16]). Concerning the North of Brazil, no information on existing Bear communities in that region was found.

Brazil has more than 190 million inhabitants, being São Paulo the most populous city with more than eleven million inhabitants (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2010). Although it is not the national capital, São Paulo has a major economic and cultural importance in Brazil. Data from the municipality of São Paulo (*Cidade de São Paulo*, 2011) demonstrate, for example, that it has the largest stock exchange in South America, the largest hospital in Latin America and the biggest LGBT Pride Parade in the world. The number of people in the LGBT Pride Parade of São Paulo has reached more than three million in the last five years (*Parada,* 2010), a number much higher than the biggest European Pride (namely, Madrid Pride, with approximately two million people[17]), Toronto Pride (with over 1,2 million people[18]) and San Francisco Pride (with approximately one million people[19]). São Paulo represents a global city (Sassen, 2001) with a prolific gay scene, being the Bear culture part of it.

From the few Brazilian sources that report the history of the Bear phenomenon in the country, it is possible to apprehend that it emerged in the second half of the 1990s, initially in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (*Ursos do Rio*, 2007*; Ursos de Pernambuco,* 2010). Both of

---

[15] Data of the Bear communities on Facebook from São Paulo, Paraná and Bahia were respectively retrieved 1 May, 2012 from http://www.facebook.com/associacao.ursosdesp, http://www.facebook.com/ursosdoparana and http://www.facebook.com/groups/198906590218828/)

[16] The Facebook group of Bears from Brasília has 250 members and from Goiás has 136 members, respectively retrieved 1 May, 2012 from http://www.facebook.com/ursos.dodf and http://www.facebook.com/groups/ursosdegoias/ on 01.07.2012.

[17] Retrieved 1 June, 2012, from http://orgullolgtb.org/2011/in-english/
[18] Retrieved 1 June, 2012, from http://www.pridetoronto.com/about/
[19] Retrieved 1 June, 2012, from http://sfpride.org/heritage/2011.html

14

these sources also emphasize the importance of the internet as a tool that allowed Bears to get acquainted and organize their first meetings. Nowadays, a very popular Brazilian social network for Bears is the website *Ursos* (1999), which was created in 1999 and has more than 54,000 members. Besides this, there are popular Brazilian online magazines addressed specifically to Bears, such as *Bernardo Magz* and *Bear Mais Magazine*; and a number of websites and blogs on Bear culture, such as *WoofBrasil* and *Bearnerd*[20].

On the other hand, in the past couple of years, the number of Bear parties in São Paulo has been increasing. One of the most representative examples of the popularity the Bear culture has gained in the city is the party "Ursound". The Bear party "Ursound" was created in 2005 and at that time it used to take place one Sunday a month with approximately fifty attendees (*Ursound*, n.d.). Nowadays, it takes place every two weeks with more than five hundred attendees, being the biggest Bear party in Brazil. One of the interviewees for this research, Artur, who has been working in the organization of Ursound, claimed that this party is one of the biggest regular Bear parties in the world. Other clubs, such as Cantho, D-edge and Hot Hot[21], have also included in their program a regular party dedicated to Bears.

The presence of Bear parties in many different clubs of São Paulo not only indicates a greater popularity of Bears in the city, but it also helps to make different types of gay men more visible. It is not rare to find in the narratives of Bears a marked distinction (and even, hostility) in relation to *barbies* – a term often used within São Paulo's gay community to refer to gay men who look manly and have a muscular and toned body (França, 2007) –, as observed in the narratives of five of the interviewees (Augusto, Pedro, Julio, Carlos and

---

[20] Retrieved 1 June, 2012, from http://bernardomagz.com.br/ , http://www.bearmaismagazine.com.br/ , http://www.woofbrasil.com/ , http://www.bearnerd.com.br/

[21] Retrieved 23 May, 2012 respectively from http://www.bearcantho.com.br/, http://bearplanet.com.br/ and http://www.hothotsite.com.br/blog/

Roberto). The presence of Bear parties in clubs that traditionally did not use to target this audience represents the presence of Bears not only in marginalized, but also gay mainstream spaces, which include spaces usually attended by *barbies*. "Nowadays Bears are trendy", stated Artur. Maybe the profusion of Bear parties in São Paulo is mainly related to commercial interests, as stated by Pedro, "Nowadays everybody wants money from the fatties". Nevertheless, it may also indicate that "the barrier between Bears and *barbies* is less rigid, the limit has expanded" (Artur).

1.6 Chapter's conclusion

This chapter sought to present important elements that shape the Bear community and describe the Bear phenomenon in Brazil and in São Paulo. Firstly, I introduced that each community and even each man has his own definition of Bear. Secondly, I explained that the emergence of the Bear community is related to a response to AIDS and the "Castro clone" stereotype. Thirdly, I described that it is a community spread in many countries of all continents, and it also represents a niche market, with a wide range of products addressed exclusively to Bears. Fourthly, I addressed issues of race and class, by pointing out that the members of the Bear community are overwhelmingly white, middle-class men, from the urban area – in contrast to the symbolic image of a Bear as a lumberjack from the woods or a working-class man. It was also explained the association of the working-class with white hairy men.

Furthermore, I also described that the Bear phenomenon started to flourish in Brazil in the second half of the 1990s, initially in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, being the internet an important tool for the dissemination of this culture throughout the country. Finally, I pointed

out that São Paulo represents a global city with a prolific gay scene and the Bear subculture has gained increasing popularity in recent years.

I turn now to the next chapter, which aims to build a theoretical foundation upon which this research is based. "Theoretical Framework" provides an explanation of the concepts applied to develop an integrative approach to understand constitutive forces in the emerging Bear culture, which is the goal of this thesis.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In recent investigations on men and masculinities, such as Bridges (2009), Coles (2008, 2009), Gill, Henwood, and McLean (2005), Hennen (2005) and Monaghan (2005), it is observed the use of theories of two main scholars, namely, R. W. Connell and Pierre Bourdieu. The former is regarded as responsible for the development and dissemination of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which has been a key one in the field. In turn, Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capital have been widely applied to analyse the masculine domination and embodiment of masculinity. Not only the theories of Connell and Bourdieu are used separately in the studies on men and masculinities, but also they are used combined. The combination of these two bodies of knowledge seems to enrich the studies of men's lived experience of masculinities and has particularly been used by Coles (2008, 2009) and Bridges (2009).

This chapter aims, first, to present Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity and the Bourdieusian concepts of habitus, capital, and field. Having presented these concepts, which are the basis for the development of the theories of Coles (2008; 2009) and Bridges (2009), this chapter will then explain the theoretical model of the field of masculinity (Coles, 2008; 2009) and the concept of gender capital (Bridges, 2009). The concepts of hegemonic masculinity, habitus, capital, field, the field of masculinity and gender capital will be employed later to analyse the constitutive forces in the emerging Bear culture.

2.1 Hegemonic masculinity

The concept of hegemonic masculinity was first proposed in the beginning of the 80s[22], but it only gained greater recognition in 1987 due to the publication of Connell's article on hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity in *Gender and Power* (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). From the end of the 80s on, this concept has deeply affected and influenced researches on men and masculinities; as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) stated: "We may reasonably conclude that the analysis of multiple masculinities and the concept of hegemonic masculinity served as a framework for much of the developing research effort on men and masculinity" (p.834). This section focuses on some of the main points that constitute this concept.

Hegemonic masculinity concerns the existent dynamics of gender in the society as a whole. Connell (1987) argues that the interrelation of the forms of femininity and masculinity are marked by one crucial structural fact, namely, "The global dominance of men over women" (p.183). Such dominance shapes the way relationships among men are organized and also contributes to constitute a hegemonic form of masculinity in society. It is important to draw attention to the fact that hegemonic masculinity is not only constructed in relation to women, but also in relation to various subordinated masculinities, as observed in the following quote:

Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly

---

[22] For detailed information of the use of the concept in the beginning of the 80s, see Connell and Messerschmidt (2005).

normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men. (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832)

The quote above suggests that one of the main differences between hegemonic and subordinated masculinities lies on the power they wield: whereas the former is a reference to the ideal male behaviour, the latter seems to be constituted as a response to the former. Hegemonic masculinity comprises all characteristics to be a "proper" manly man; it is an ideal of masculinity to be achieved. I know the words "all", "proper" and "ideal" can be regarded as an exaggeration, however that is precisely my goal. Hegemonic masculinity works indeed as an ideal, as a reference model for masculinity; it does not represent the type of masculinity that is experienced by most men, but it rather gains strength in society primarily by creating an illusion of an ideal masculine man.

Although hegemonic masculinity is not enacted by most men, Connell (1987) argues that many of them contribute to sustain it as they "benefit from the subordination of women" (p. 185). This benefit was designated as the "patriarchal dividend" (Connell, 1995, p. 82) and it is described in terms of "honour, prestige and the right to command, as well as in relation to material and state power" (Coles, 2009, p. 31). According to this logic, men supporting hegemonic masculinity is intrinsically linked to having a privileged position and (more) power, and also to supporting the maintenance of "patriarchy and their dominant position over women" (Coles, 2009, p. 31). Thereby, the privileged position it gives to men, the ideal of masculinity it creates and the power it wields all contribute to make hegemonic masculinity normative.

The major influence hegemonic masculinity has in society can also be observed in its relation to subordinated masculinities. The latter, according to Connell (1987), do not even

need to be clearly defined, since "achieving hegemony may consist precisely in preventing alternatives gaining cultural definition and recognition as alternatives, confining them to ghettos, to privacy, to unconsciousness" (p. 186). This quote sheds light to an important aspect of the dynamics of gender in society: at the same time that there are non-hegemonic forms of masculinity, the patriarchal social order works in such a way that does not promote the cultural recognition of them. The logic of the patriarchal social order aims to exalt hegemonic masculinity and not legitimize masculinities different from it, which are regarded as other or subordinated.

It is important to emphasize that the fact of men enacting subordinated masculinities does not mean that they do not support hegemonic masculinity; instead, "Most men are complicit in supporting hegemonic masculinity, despite being subordinated or marginalized by it" (Coles, 2008, p. 233). Hegemonic masculinity seems to gain more relevance precisely among men showing a complicit masculinity, which means among those who do not enact it but receive the benefits of patriarchy, as stated below:

> The public face of hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily what powerful men are, but what sustains their power and what large numbers of men are motivated to support. The notion of 'hegemony' generally implies a large measure of consent. Few men are Bogarts or Stallones, many collaborate in sustaining those images. (Connell, 1987, p.185)

Hence, the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity in the society as a whole is not necessarily related only to the existence of powerful men, but rather to the existence of many men who despite not being that powerful support this ideal. Hegemonic masculinity often comprises the creation of models of masculinity, as it "works in part through the production of exemplars of masculinity (e.g., professional sports stars), symbols that have authority

despite the fact that most men and boys do not fully live up to them" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 846). It is possible to observe that although hegemonic masculinity can be quite far from men's lived experience of masculinity (such as the examples of sports stars and film characters), it does work as a goal that many men are inclined to reach.

Another fundamental characteristic of hegemonic masculinity is related to the very meaning of the term "hegemony". Connell (1987) makes use of this term in reference to Gramsci's[23] analyses and states that its meaning is closely related to ascendancy. What is essential to be understood when mentioning hegemony is that it "did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.832). That means that it is not hegemony when ascendancy is achieved by the use of guns or threats. Hegemony instead refers to "a cultural process of domination. It organizes, monitors and restricts the ways in which new ideas or systems of valuation are established, eliminated or naturalized in ways that subtly alter notions of 'common sense' within fields of practice" (Bridges, 2009, p. 88).

Nevertheless, because hegemony is achieved by cultural domination, it does not mean total cultural dominance. Connell (1987) draws attention to the fact that hegemony does not imply the suppression of alternatives, but that "other patterns and groups are subordinated rather than eliminated" (p. 184). Thereby, it is possible to infer that hegemonic masculinity works in a way that provides a space for other masculinities to exist; however, they only exist subordinated to it. In contemporary society, according to Connell (1987), hegemonic masculinity is primarily related to being heterosexual, while homosexuality is a very illustrative form of subordinated masculinity.

---

[23] For more information on Gramsci's work on hegemony, see Gramsci, A. (2005 [1971]) *Selections from Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. New York: International Publishers.

Besides sexual orientation, Connell (1995) points out other factors that contribute to provide or not a more privileged position to men, such as age, class and ethnicity. It is worth mentioning here that hegemonic masculinity comprises a set of features that are exalted at a particular time; it is not the same since the beginning of time, but rather it depends on historical conditions:

> At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (Connell, 1995, 77)

Based on this passage, we can infer that hegemonic masculinity is also defined by its fluidity, which means that it is not rigid or fixed in time, but rather that it changes historically. This characteristic of fluidity along with the depiction of layers of masculinities in society (such as hegemonic and subordinated) are the central factors, I consider, that make the concept of hegemonic masculinity a useful theoretical tool. The concept of hegemonic masculinity gains importance, therefore, by representing the model of masculinity at a given time and by shedding light to the interplay of power between different forms of masculinity in society.

2.2 Bourdieu: habitus, capital, and field

The French philosopher and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was one of the most notorious scholars of the second half of the twentieth century and his works have been

23

extensively analysed and cited in current research. The great importance of his theories is mainly related to the applicability they have for a wide range of academic disciplines. Due to the aim of this thesis, which is to analyse the constitutive forces in the emerging Bear culture, this section will cover important concepts of Bourdieu that are thoroughly used in the scholarship of men and masculinities, namely, habitus, capital, and field.

The major contribution of Bourdieu is associated with his approach to social theory that considers

> how individual practice is shaped and the various strategies that are employed by agents in everyday life. In doing so, Bourdieu introduces the notion of constructivist structuralism that considers how individuals support and challenge dominant social structures through their individual practices. The inference of Bourdieu's theory of practice is that individuals are neither completely free to choose their destinies nor forced to behave according to objective norms or rules imposed upon them. (Coles, 2009, p. 34)

The theories of Bourdieu did not seek to privilege either objectivism or subjectivism, but rather they sought to overcome this dualism by "integrating both subjective experience and objective structures" (Coles, 2009, p. 34). The interplay of objectivism and subjectivism, structure and agency, can be better observed in his theory of taste, which describes "individual tastes and social status distinctions" (Bridges, 2009, p. 89). When intending to understand individual tastes, Bourdieu (1984) argues that it is essential to take into account the interactions of the individual with socializing agents, such as family, social relations and class position. These interactions in turn are the ones that contribute to the reproduction of certain norms, roles, status hierarchies and inequalities in society (Bridges, 2009). The theory of taste involves three main concepts, namely, habitus, capital, and field.

24

Habitus is a very illustrative example of a concept that aims to overcome the dichotomy between objectivism and subjectivism, since

> habitus is a *mediating* notion that helps us revoke the common sense duality between the individual and the social by capturing 'the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality', that is, the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting *dispositions*, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel, and act in determinate ways, which then guide them in their creative responses to the constraints and solicitations of their extant milieu. (Wacquant, 2004, p. 316)

Thereby, habitus guides the manner of conducting oneself; it allows "individuals to navigate their way through everyday situations that require a degree of flexibility and improvisation" (Coles, 2009, p. 34). It is important to mention that habitus does not refer to something that the individual is conscious of, but instead it is non-reflexive; which means that "individuals can continuously adjust to a diversity of social situations without consciously considering each adjustment as it is made" (Bridges, 2009, p. 89). Habitus works as a mediator between the social and the individual, providing the basis for the individual's responses to the demands in society and functioning "below the level of consciousness and language" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 466).

In order to better understand the concept of habitus, it is necessary to take into consideration another Bourdieusian concept intimately related to it, namely, the concept of field. This concept "is a metaphor for domains of social life. . . . Fields shape the structure of the social setting in which habitus operates and include social institutions such as laws and education" (Coles, 2009, p. 35). It is worth mentioning here that although fields may comprise institutions, they are not necessarily the institution itself; "Fields may be inter – or

intra-institutional in scope; they can span institutions, which may represent positions within fields" (Swartz, 1997, p. 120). An example given by Coles (2009) helps to elucidate this concept; he demonstrates that gender can be considered a field among others, such as class and education, and can also comprise a number of subfields (such as the fields of masculinity and femininity) and social institutions (such as the family, for example).

It is important to notice that a particular field does not work alone or separated from other fields; its boundaries are not rigid and insurmountable, but instead it is possible that one field overlaps with others and get influenced and shaped by them (Swartz, 1997). For example, the field of masculinity may overlap with the field of femininity, as well as the field of gender may overlap with the field of class. In addition to this, another important characteristic of fields concerns power relations:

> Within any given field there are struggles over power and position that necessarily result in a dichotomous relationship between those in positions of dominance who defend their dominant position (orthodoxy), and those who are subordinated and attempt to the superiority of orthodoxy within the hierarchical order and struggle against their subordinated status (heterodoxy). (Coles, 2008, p.34)

Having a dominant or subordinated position within a certain field, according to Bourdieu (1993), depends on the value of capital the actors have. Bourdieu (1984) defines capital as "an energy which only exists and only produces its effects in the field in which it is produced and reproduced, each of the properties attached to class is given its value and efficacy by the specific laws of each field" (p.113). Social relations of power within a certain field are regulated by valued capital, which consequently becomes the "object of struggle within fields" (Coles, 2009, p. 36). The Bourdieusian concept of capital comprises mainly three different types: "Economic capital, which refers to financial resources; social capital,

26

which refers to one's social networks and the status of individuals therein; and cultural capital, which broadly considers one's cultural skills, tastes, preferences, qualifications, and so forth that operate as class distinctions" (Coles, 2009, p. 36). Hence, the valued capital individuals own determines their positions within a certain field.

One last characteristic of the concept of capital worth mentioning here is described in the following quote by Bridges (2009):

> Capital has much more to do with the perceptual status of – and relations between – resources than it does with the objective resources themselves. *Cultural capital* refers to specific repertoires of knowledge, tastes, dispositions and objects of desire that individuals within particular social spaces perceive and employ for status accumulation. The content of cultural capital only matters as it is evaluated in social practice. (p. 89)

This quote suggests that capital has value to the extent that it has social recognition; an actor gains power not because of the capital he/she owns, but because of the value this capital has in society. Finally, I also believe this quote illustrates very well one of the central aims of Bourdieu's theories mentioned in the beginning of this section, namely, the intention to transcend the dualism of subjectivism and objectivism. The example of cultural capital, as well as the concepts of habitus and field, indicates how an individual's practice is influenced by her/his interactions with socializing agents. There is no emphasis only on subjectivity or society, internality or externality, but rather on the interaction of both and how this interaction is associated with social status distinctions.

2.3 The Field of Masculinity and Gender Capital

As stated in the first paragraph of this chapter, there are a number of scholars who seek to combine Connell and Bourdieu's theories in order to better understand how the notions of masculinity are reflected in men's lived experience. Among other scholars, I believe the works of Coles (2008, 2009) and Bridges (2009) are particular relevant due to the applicability of their ideas to analyse the Bear community. The former proposed a theoretical model called the field of masculinity based mainly on Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity and the Bourdieusian concept of field. The latter, in turn, developed the idea of gender capital, taking into consideration the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and cultural capital. The aim of this section is precisely to present and explain both the notions of the field of masculinity and gender capital, as well as to analyse their importance for the scholarship of men and masculinities, and more specifically for the analysis of the Bear community.

Concerning the field of masculinity, Coles (2009) considers that although the theories of Connell have a crucial importance in the study of men and masculinities, it also presents some limitations, "Particularly in relation to the disparity between the theoretical concept of hegemonic masculinity as the culturally dominant ideal and men's lived experiences of a variety of dominant masculinities" (p. 30). Masculinity, according to Coles (2009), has often been analysed as the relation between dominant and subordinate/marginalized masculinities, and little attention has been given to the fluidity of masculinity and how men's masculinities can be "dominant in relation to other men, despite being subordinate in relation to the cultural ideal" (p. 30).

Coles (2009) argues that it is necessary to have a closer look to the masculinities that exist in men's lives, and therefore he incorporates the Bourdieusian concepts of field, habitus,

and capital with Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity. By the combination of Bourdieu and Connell's theories, Coles (2009) develops the theoretical model of the field of masculinity, which

> introduces the possibility of multiple dominant masculinities that operate within subfields bound by a field of masculinity. The model also outlines the ways in which masculinities are both produced and reproduced as a consequence of struggles between dominant and subordinate groups of men. These struggles also provide a rationale for resistance and complicity determined by what is deemed to be valued capital within the field of masculinity. (p. 30)

Based on his qualitative research of 41 semi-structured interviews with adult men (over the age of 18) in Australia, Coles (2008) concluded that "their lived experiences of masculinity were not of being subordinated or marginalized by hegemonic masculinity; to the contrary, they considered their own masculinity to be dominant despite being incompatible with, or varying from, the hegemonic ideal" (p. 234). Coles (2008) emphasizes that despite the fact of men recognizing that there is a culturally hegemonic type of masculinity, "They did not allow it to necessarily subordinate them at the individual level in the context of their everyday lives" (p.234). He sheds light to the fact of men negotiating masculinities in their everyday situations, or negotiating their position within the field of masculinity.

As any given field involves struggles between dominant and subordinate positions (Bourdieu, 1993), the case of the field of masculinity is not different. Nevertheless, rather than considering that the field of masculinity only includes struggles between hegemonic masculinity and subordinated masculinities, Coles (2009) also points out the struggles between hegemonic masculinity and alternative dominant masculinities. "Those in dominant positions strive to conserve the status quo by monopolizing definitions of masculinity and the

29

value and distribution of capital, while subordinate challengers look to subversive strategies, thus generating flux and mechanisms for change" (Coles, 2009, p. 36). Similar to any given field, the position of the actors within the field of masculinity depends on the value of capital they possess: whereas owing valued masculine capital means a privileged status, owning a not valued one means marginalization or subordination.

Coles (2009) presents some examples that better illustrate the types of valued capital within the field of masculinity. For example, in "the field of militia, toughness and brute physical strength represent dominant versions of masculinity, and the body is valued as physical capital" (Coles, 2009, p. 42). On the other hand, in the field of financial markets, economic capital is highly valued and dominant masculinity may be represented by men performing audacious market strategies. Coles (2009) emphasizes that "hegemonic masculinity may be that which is culturally exalted at any given time, but dominant masculinities need to be drawn from this and contextualized within a given field (or subfield), as well as located culturally and historically" (p. 33). By explaining that masculinities are valued differently depending on each specific context, Coles (2009) argues the existence of multiple dominant masculinities.

Furthermore, the Bourdieusian concept of habitus is also related to the model of the field of masculinity. As De Visser, Smith, and McDonnell (2009) state, "One way of conceiving of habitus in relation to gender identity is the subjective embodiment of social discourses of masculinity" (p. 1048). Embodied masculinity involves the way someone expresses masculinity by his/her body; the versions of masculinity that are observable by one's body and social behaviour. Coles (2009) illustrates how habitus and embodied masculinity are entangled:

30

The concept of habitus also works to describe how men negotiate masculinity. Being both durable and transposable, men use masculinity as a resourceful strategy to function in their everyday lives. Without the men being consciously aware of it, men's actions reflect this strategy (e.g., posture, gait, gestures, speech, etc.) of performing masculinity. (p. 38)

Habitus and the embodiment of masculinity both present the characteristic of representing the external and the internal, as well as "habitus is a *mediating* [emphasis in original] notion that helps us revoke the common sense duality between the individual and the social by capturing 'the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality'" (Wacquant, 2004, p. 316), embodied masculinity represents at the same time an individual feature and also the social versions of masculinity enacted by someone. Habitus, as the "subjective embodiment of social discourses of masculinity" (De Visser et al., 2009, p. 1048) and consequently associated with a more or less form of valued capital, contributes to how men negotiate their masculinities within the field of masculinity.

On the other hand, Coles (2009) points out that the field of masculinity is also characterized by the influence of other fields, such as age and ethnicity, forming "a complex matrix of masculinities" (p. 42). The fields of gay masculinity, aged masculinity, black masculinity, working-class masculinity, disabled masculinity, among others, are described by Coles (2008) as "subfields within the field of masculinity" (p. 235). It is important to mention that although some men may be considered as subordinated by hegemonic masculinity, "They may assume a dominant masculine identity in an alternate subfield in which the capital that they own is valued" (Coles, 2008, p. 235). The notion of subfields, therefore, recognizes the existence of a number of dominant masculinities in the field of masculinity that are not the hegemonic one.

Besides this, Coles (2008) points out that having a masculinity that is valued as dominant within a certain subfield is one of the strategies that men, who are subordinated by the cultural ideal of masculinity, use "for negotiating their position in the field of masculinity" (p. 243). An example is appropriate to explain this passage. If we take the case of gay masculinity, particularly relevant for the aim of this work, gay men are regarded as subordinated by hegemonic masculinity exactly because of the same-sex attraction and sexual activity, because they are not heterosexual. Nevertheless, despite being subordinate, they can negotiate

> their position by fixing their attention on their own valued capital in the field of gay masculinity. Here they assumed a dominant position in relation to other gay men such as 'queens' and 'fairies'. By drawing on elements of hegemonic masculinity that supported their dominant position, they were able to validate their own masculinity. (Coles, 2008, p.243)

This quote suggests that although gay men do not have a privileged position within the field of masculinity (precisely for not being heterosexual), they are able to gain privileges and recognition by "focusing on their dominant position in relation to other men in the field of gay masculinity" (Coles, 2008, p.243). Within the field of gay masculinity, homosexuality is not a less valued form of capital, and other criteria, in turn, are taken into account when considering a dominant masculinity over others, such as not being a "queen" or a "fairy". Hence, by presenting "versions of dominant gay masculinity valued in the field of gay masculinity" (Coles, 2008, p. 245), some gay men may experience their masculinity is not the subordinated one, although having a subordinated position in relation to the culturally hegemonic ideal.

The interplay between different forms of masculinity within subfields, I consider, can be adequately applied to analyse the Bear community. By presenting a more rugged type of masculinity, some members of the Bear community may represent "dominant gay masculinities within the field of gay masculinity" (Coles, 2009, p. 39). The type of masculinity claimed by some Bears at times seems to have a higher status within the field of gay masculinity. Although Bears do not represent the hegemonic ideal of masculinity, they may experience their masculinities have a "dominant position in relation to other gay men such as 'queens' and 'fairies'" (Coles, 2008, p. 243).

A detailed explanation of the relation between the theoretical model of the field of masculinity and Bears will be drawn in the chapter "Masculinities within the Bear community". I turn now to the introduction of another concept that will be applied to analyse the constitutive forces in the emerging Bear culture, namely, gender capital. The concept of gender capital developed by Bridges (2009) is based mainly on Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity and the Bourdieusian concept of cultural capital. Bridges (2009) considers that both the concepts of cultural capital and hegemonic masculinity are useful tools to analyse "systems of valuation that vary between and among groups" (p. 84). More specifically, they are useful not only to analyse groups of men in relation to women, but also men in relation to other men.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork and interview data from a U.S. male bodybuilding community, Bridges (2009) argues that "hegemonic masculinity takes different shapes in different fields of interaction, acting as a form of cultural capital: gender capital" (p. 84). The author states that although individuals seek to embody hegemonic idealizations, such as notions of hegemonic masculinity, "Bodies are not only inscribed with gender, inscriptions are read, and read differently by different social actors and in different settings" (p.83).

33

Although bodybuilding is considered a masculine practice in almost any setting, Bridges (2009) argues that the notions of masculinity vary by context. Despite having high status in the gym, bodybuilders' masculinity may appear "more subordinate in the interaction outside of the gym" (Bridges, 2009, p. 96), being even stigmatized outside the gym setting.

The concept of gender capital "attempts to foreground the independent effect of context on the relative value of gendered presentations of self" (Bridges, 2009, p.92). It seeks to provide a theoretical tool to analyse in which ways some attributes are taken as masculine or feminine, depending on different social actors and different situations. Gender capital might be different for men and women in some contexts and might overlap in others. Bridges (2009) describes, for example, that confidence can be valued as more masculine or more feminine depending on different contexts. Since it is characteristic of any given capital, gender capital has also different meanings and values within different fields.

Although not being the only element that constitutes gender capital, bodies represent a central element. The case of male bodybuilders, presented by Bridges (2009), illustrates the physical embodiment of gender capital. It is here where I consider that the concept of gender capital can be applied to analyse the Bear community. The overweight, not toned, and hairy body can also be considered as a form of gender capital among Bears; being not thin, not toned and not having the body depilated can be valued as (more) masculine. Within the Bear community, those bodily attributes may provide social recognition and high status for those who have it, representing a form of gender capital.

Furthermore, another important aspect pointed out by Bridges (2009) is that

bodybuilders provide an excellent example of how subcultures monitor cultural (bodily) capital, and what I am calling 'gender capital'. Wacquant (1995a, 1995b)

34

discusses bodily capital to explain the diverse ways through which bodies are evaluated in the boxing world in preparation for fights – how the subculture alters their 'aesthetic dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1984) toward what Wacquant (1995b) terms the 'pugilistic point of view'. (p. 86)

The case of bodybuilders, pugilists and I also include Bears can be representative of how 'aesthetic dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1984) are delineated within a specific subculture. The Bear community may illustrate how the ideal of a Bear – a stocky hairy man from the woods with jeans and flannel checked shirts – works in such a way that monitors bodies and aesthetic standards, what could be called as the "Bear point of view".

To conclude, Bridges (2009) emphasizes that it is necessary to analyse not only "the ways that bodybuilders have a relationship with a hegemonic masculine form, but also to discuss the ways that they physically and discursively manage capital field-specifically" (p. 87). Similar to the analysis of the bodybuilders, I believe that when it comes to the Bear community it is important to analyse not only the way certain bodily characteristics constitute a form of gender capital, but also how the meanings and values of this gender capital vary between and within groups. The narratives of the members of the Bear community of São Paulo suggest multiple meanings for the gender capital embodied by them; meanings that vary not only between Bears and non Bears, but also within Bears. The results of the interviews as well as a more detailed explanation of the application of the concept of gender capital to analyse the constitutive forces within the Bear culture are the aims of the chapters "Interview Analysis" and "Masculinities within the Bear community". Before moving to these chapters, I present now the methodology employed in this research.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

As the aim of this research is to better understand the constitutive forces in the emerging Bear subculture, the methodology was based on a qualitative approach and involved eleven semi-structured interviews with members of the Bear community of São Paulo. In order to organize the presentation of the methodological aspects of this study, this chapter is divided in four sections. The first one seeks to present the importance of studying the Bear culture. The second section intends to position the methodology used here in the field of qualitative research. Subsequently, the third section addresses the ethical issues of this investigation; and, finally, the fourth section aims to describe both the profile of the participants and the interview process.

3.1 Feminist goals, Bear culture, and gender politics

The analysis of the Bear community gains importance because it is an emergent subculture within the gay community that, on the one hand, is marginalized by the hegemonic gay culture; and, on the other hand, it is a subculture that has rapidly grown in various parts of the world since the mid-1980s. At the same time that many people, including many gay men and women, do not know about Bears, it is possible to observe the existence of Bear communities in many countries, such as in North, Central, and South America, Europe, New Zealand, Australia (Hennen, 2005), Turkey, Russia (Wright, 2005), Japan (Shimko, 2002), Lebanon, and Syria (McCormick, 2011). Hence, developing a research on this community meets feminist goals by researching the everyday life of a number of gay and bisexual men,

"The personal is researchable" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 426); it meets feminist goals by shedding light to a subculture that is existent worldwide and is frequently invisible.

In addition to this, studying the Bear culture is also related to aspects of gender-political agendas. Bodies, identities and individual practices are not only an individual issue, but rather they are embedded and part of social relations (Adkins, 2003). Although the Bear phenomenon is not a political movement, this does not mean that it does not have implications for gender politics. By studying the Bear community, it is possible to examine how identities, bodies and practices represent the way interactional orders are produced and reproduced (Goffman, 1983), such as the illustrative case of the interplay between Bear culture and hegemonic masculinity. On the one hand, manly men having same-sex sex challenge hegemonic masculinity by disrupting the stereotype of manly man as heterosexual. On the other hand, the devaluation of the feminine within the Bear community indicates the reproduction of the gender hierarchy centred on male dominance. Thereby, it is possible to observe that Bears at the same time challenge and reproduce notions of hegemonic masculinity[24].

3.2 Qualitative methods

Qualitative research is a complex term that involves a number of different assumptions. For the methodology of this thesis, I relied on the notion of qualitative research given by Denzin and Lincoln (2003) that refers to "an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings,

---

[24] More details of the interplay between Bear culture and hegemonic masculinity are explained in the chapter 5 "Masculinities within the Bear community".

attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 2). Qualitative research comprises the study and analysis of a number of empirical materials, such as case study, interview and visual texts, that "describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 2). Moreover, these authors also make use of the trope of a bricolage when describing qualitative research, and the researcher as a *bricoleur*, as stated in the following quote:

> The *bricoleur* produces a bricolage, that is, a pieced-together, close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in a concrete situation. 'The solution (bricolage) which is the result of the *bricoleur's* method is an [emergent] construction' (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991, p. 161) that changes and takes new forms as different tools, methods, and techniques are added to the puzzle. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 2)

The word bricolage used in the quote above refers not only to the application of multiple methods in qualitative research, but also to the process in which these methods are articulated and combined in order to shape a whole. It is important to notice that the trope of a bricolage is very illustrative to represent qualitative research to the extent that it refers to a result that may be not known by the *bricoleur* at the beginning. That means that the bricolage may take a different form from the original idea; as stated in the quote above, a bricolage refers to a construction susceptible to undergo changes and take new forms. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the *bricoleur* is a passive figure in that process, she/he plays a significant role and is aware that the process may pass through changes that influence and may give new directions to the results, "The *bricoleur* understands that research is an interactive process" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 3).

The trope of a bricolage, and the susceptibility to undergo changes and take new forms, is adequate to describe the development of the methodology of this thesis; and in order to explain it, I will give a brief explanation of the process of designing the methodology for this research.

My initial idea was to conduct interviews with gay men identified as Bears in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. Nevertheless, due to time and budget constraints, it was not possible to do fieldwork in São Paulo. Among other alternatives, videoconference via Skype demonstrated to be the most appropriate solution, due to two main reasons. First, in comparison to the possibility of sending written questionnaires to the participants, videoconference presents the benefit of having a real-time interaction. Secondly, videoconference also has the advantage of having the image of the participants; it is not only the audio, as it would be a telephone conversation, but rather the interaction and communication are also affected by the display of the images of both the interviewer and the interviewee. Thereby, videoconference via Skype seemed to be the option most similar to face-to-face interview, and proved to be the most suitable for the purposes of this research.

In order to get more prepared for the interviews, I conducted preliminary interviews via Skype with two participants (Augusto and Fernando[25]), which were like an informal conversation. The impact of these preliminary interviews on my future work was decisive and, like one of the characteristics of bricolage, it gave a new form to my research. From the many findings those preliminary interviews provided me, I will present here only the most significant one, which is related to not having a unique definition of a Bear. The stereotypical notion of a Bear is a stocky gay or bisexual man with a hairy body, facial hair and a

---

[25] In order to respect the anonymity of the interviewees, I use fictional names.

"masculine" attitude. The word masculine is in quotation marks because it is not that easy to determine what a masculine or a feminine behaviour is; and, maybe in this case, the word "masculine" shares with the word "Bear" this uneasiness to grasp their meaning. How do we define a masculine man?[26] How can we measure a masculinity of a certain man? How do we define someone as a Bear?

The difficulty of defining someone as a Bear is well illustrated by the preliminary interview with one of the participants, Augusto. I got to know him by a friend of mine, who told me he could indicate a Bear to be interviewed. Augusto is a 36 year-old white gay man, born in São Paulo, overweight, with facial and body hair. In the beginning of the interview, I told him that I was conducting a research on the Bear community and Augusto told me that he often goes to Bear parties, but he does not identify himself as a Bear. When Augusto said he did not consider himself as a Bear, I thought I was expecting that he would define himself as one because my friend told me that and also because of my own stereotypical ideas. The fact that he was overweight, hairy and goes often to Bear parties (obviously) does not necessarily define him as a Bear.

Nevertheless, two other facts deserve closer attention. The first one is that in one of these preliminary interviews, Augusto was with his boyfriend, who claimed to date only Bears, emphasizing that all his boyfriends have always been Bears. Although his boyfriend did not state explicitly that Augusto was a Bear, he indicated that. In addition to this, the second fact worth mentioning is that Augusto said that some Bears have a bear paw tattooed on their body, in order to be easily identified as one. Augusto showed me his bear paw tattoo on his shoulder and pointed out that many men who like Bears find this tattoo sexually

---

[26] A more detailed debate on masculinity is presented in chapter 5 "Masculinities among Bears".

arousing, and that having this tattoo helps him to find sexual partners. Despite the fact that Augusto does not identify himself as a Bear, he is aware that many gay men identify him as such, and he also knows what is valued within the Bear community when it comes to attract sexual partners, what Monaghan (2005) describes as "sexual currency" (p. 101). Augusto uses not only his own bodily characteristics, but also a certain Bear attribute – the bear paw tattoo – for his benefit. Thereby, I believe the anecdote of Augusto illustrates the problematic issue of defining someone as a Bear.

Concerning the methodology of my thesis, the first interview with Augusto, and also interviews with other participants, made me conclude that it was not necessary (and maybe it did not make sense) to restrict interviewees to only Bears. Men who are not big, hairy, or masculine, and also men who do not identify themselves as Bears but participate in the Bear community can also provide a valuable knowledge that fits the goal of my thesis, which is to understand the constitutive forces in the emerging Bear culture. Similar to the susceptibility to changes of a bricolage, there was a redefinition of the selection of interviewees in my research: from only Bears to men who take part in the Bear community, which I will call from now on members of the Bear community[27].

3.3 Ethical issues

When conducting a feminist research, Reinharz (1992) emphasizes that it is crucial to consider its political dimension; which means that the phenomena of the everyday life are not worthless or negligible, but rather they must be regarded as politics. It is relevant to mention that the political aspect of a research is not only associated with focusing on the everyday

---

[27] Detailed information about the profile of the interviews is given in the section 3.4.

life, but also with intervening in people's life. Interviewing and asking personal questions to someone is also a political thing, and this was taken into account when I conducted the interviews. One good example of this is when I asked to the members of the Bear community how they would define a Bear. It was possible to observe that this question often opened a space for self-reflection; it seemed that in that moment the interviewees reflected whether they are Bears or not, why they consider or not themselves as a Bear; they seemed to reflect on their own identities and behaviours.

Besides this, a major ethical issue of this research concerned the informed consent form. Since the interviews were conducted via Skype and the participants were in a different continent, having the consent form signed by them would be a difficult task. However, it was still possible to have a written confirmation from the interviewees by sending them an e-mail and asking for a reply agreeing (or not) with the conditions of the consent form. The model of the consent form can be found in appendix 1, and involves the voluntary participation in the research, privacy and anonymity.

The fact that the participation in the research was voluntary and there was an informed consent form was essential to both researcher and participants, while the former got permission to conduct the interviews, the latter came to know whether and how they could contribute to the research (O'Leary, 2004; Gray, Williamson, Karp, & Dalphin, 2007). Another ethical concern was related to the privacy and anonymity of the interviewees. Their privacy was protected by not mentioning their real names (Neuman, 1997). Although all names mentioned here are very typical in Brazil, they do not represent the real names of the participants; the choice of using Brazilian names was rather to make reference to the Brazilian reality.

Regarding anonymity, in a variety of types of research it is necessary to preserve the identity of the participants; nevertheless, I believe anonymity is particular relevant when studying the Bear community of São Paulo, because many of its members know each other. Even in a metropolis as large as São Paulo, it is not uncommon that many members of the gay community know each other; and the probability is higher when it comes to a subculture of this community.

3.4 Profile of the participants and interview process

The empirical data of this research included eleven semi-structured interviews, conducted via Skype video conference, between January and May 2012. The justification of using semi-structured interviews is similar to the one described by Coles (2008), who also conducted these types of interviews as part of his research for "investigating meaning and understanding in the lives of men" (p.236). According to Coles (2008):

Semi-structured interviews were used because they have the advantage of allowing for the contrasting and comparing of results across the range of men interviewed, while also providing the flexibility to probe responses and engage in greater understanding of the participants' own perspectives; that is, semi-structured interviewing allowed for depth as well as structure. (p. 236)

The semi-structured interviews were conducted as an informal conversation and were based on a guideline that can be found in appendix 3. They were done in Portuguese and I extensively took notes during each interview and also immediately after each one of them. The interviews were translated to English, and all the quotes present in this research are my translations. The length of the interviews varied from 27 minutes to almost two hours,

43

having most of them lasted approximately one hour. The method employed to recruit participants was snowball sampling and volunteer sampling. The selection of the participants involved the following criteria: participants must be men, they must be older than 18, live in São Paulo and take part in the events of the Bear community for at least two years. As already stated before, the initial aim was to interview only people who define themselves as Bears; nevertheless, the preliminary interviews indicated that also people who do not identify themselves as Bears, but take part frequently in Bear events – like *chasers* and men like Augusto, who is identified by others as a Bear, although he does not consider himself one – could also meet the purposes of the present research.

Regarding the characteristics of the interviewees, they ranged in age between 25 and 53 years. Although all of them were living in São Paulo by the time they were interviewed, three of them were not originally from this city. About their educational background, eight of the eleven participants have a Bachelor's degree (two out of these eight have a Master's degree as well), two were doing their undergraduate studies by the time they were interviewed, and one had started an undergraduate course but did not finish it. All the participants were employed by the time they were interviewed and, as already mentioned that many members of the Bear community know each other, I chose to not disclose the professions of the participants neither their careers in order to protect their privacy.

Concerning the process of interviewing, it is worth mentioning not only the interviewee's characteristics, but also the characteristics of the interviewer and the encounter of these two subjectivities with different characteristics. As emphasized by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), "This method [interview] is influenced by the personal characteristics of the interviewer, including race, class, ethnicity and gender" (p.353) and it must be considered as

a space of intersubjectivity construction. All the interviewees were white, gay, and middle class men[28], and these characteristics framed their discourses. Since "an inter/view is an exchange between *two* [emphasis in original] subjects" (Portelli, 1995, p.31), my characteristics as also a gay white middle class man from São Paulo may also have influenced the interviews.

The profile of the participants can be associated with two main factors. The first is that the Bear community in São Paulo – similar to what Hennen (2005) described of a Bear community in U.S. – is formed mainly by white, gay, and middle class men. Since in Brazil the middle class is the class most likely to invest in higher education (*Secretaria de Assuntos Estratégicos,* 2012), it is plausible that almost all interviewees have a Bachelor's degree. Besides this, the second factor worth mentioning is that, since the method employed to recruit the participants was snowball sampling and volunteer sampling – which included contacting with friends of friends, people not far from my own social circle –, it is not surprising that the interviewees and I have similar backgrounds.

The fact that the interview is the result of the encounter of the interviewee and the interviewer's subjectivities was critical when analysing and interpreting the narratives. As Shopes (2007) points out, narratives reflect "not only a narrator's individual creativity but also his particular historical position and his relationship with the interviewer, who also participates in the interview from a particular social position" (p.151). Rather than considering interviews as an absolute truth or a proof of authenticity, we shall consider them as other's person constructions of reality and as a performance. Thereby, when analysing the

---

[28] And these are also characteristics of the Bear community of São Paulo, which is mainly formed by white middle-class gay men. In his empirical investigation, Hennen (2005) also pointed out that only less than 5% of the members of a Bear community in a large city of the United States were non-white.

interviews, I struggled to give the proper context to the narratives and be aware of my interpretative authority (Shopes, 2007) as a researcher.

Having presented the profile of the participants and the interview process, as well as the methodology and the ethical issues of this research, I turn now to the presentation of the results of the interviews with the members of the Bear community of São Paulo.

CHAPTER 4

INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

The analysis of the interviews consisted first of numerous close readings of the narratives. Subsequently, the most important topics of the narratives were highlighted and grouped into categories. The categories include: definition of Bears given by the participants from São Paulo, the importance of São Paulo as a global city, the current popularization of Bear events in São Paulo, what makes the Bear community different from the broader gay community, the importance of the internet for Bears, issues of prejudice (effeminate Bears, thin men and non-Bears), age issues, and "second coming out" (Hamelin & Langway, 2010). The analysis of the notions of masculinity among Bears is not addressed in the present chapter; but rather it is extensively explained in the next one.

The first category concerns the definition of Bears given by the participants from São Paulo. Most of the interviewees (six out of eleven, namely, Julio, Felipe, Armando, Augusto, Carlos, and Leandro) stated that being a Bear is related to a "certain attitude", as also found in the empirical research of Hennen (2005). Felipe stated that being a Bear is not "caring about the current gay aesthetic, depilation, fashion clothing, do I do not know what with the hair. It is masculinity in essence; an imposing figure of masculinity. It is not about being fat, but rather a masculine gay posture". Armando, in turn, stated that being a Bear is something associated with being proud of his own masculinity, "you do not need to be a Rambo, but you need to be proud of your masculinity". In addition to this, Julio considered that a Bear is

a gay man who has no problem of assuming his weight and hair. There are various types, but more masculine, not fairies. They use a lot of beard. It involves style and

47

posture. The style of dress changes a lot [from non-Bear gays]: Bear paw, T-shirt of the community, necklaces and silver neck chains; heavy things.

On the other hand, when answering how they would define a Bear, three of the participants (Francisco, Roberto and Fernando) made a distinction between Bears from Brazil and the United States of America. For example, Roberto stated that in the U.S. a Bear is associated with a "lumberjack, he is big, strong, masculine"; while in Brazil, Bears are "very fat or men who did not like their bodies; old and fat people". Similar opinion is stated by Fernando, "They say that in many European countries and U.S. the masculine is more valued, that is not the case of Brazil. There are many Bears here that are not masculine; a Bear [in Brazil] is someone fat and hairy." Although Roberto and Fernando stated that in the U.S. Bears are more masculine, it is possible to observe that not all Bear communities in the U.S. value masculinity in the same way, as demonstrated by Wright (1997) and Baus and Hunt (2008), who both mention examples of American Bears who do not consider masculinity as an essential attribute.

Moreover, I believe the answers of Francisco, Roberto, and Fernando, when affirming that the Bear community in São Paulo is different from (or worse than) the U.S., have similarities with the idea mentioned by Bronski (2002) that the Bear community is like a "fantasy flight to the natural and the woods" (p. 31). Bronski (2002) made use of the word "fantasy" to describe how the definition of a Bear is embedded by idealization, such as the type of masculinity of a man from the woods, a lumberjack. The answers of Francisco, Roberto, and Fernando also suggest an idealization. When saying that in the U.S. Bears are more masculine, it seems those interviewees are also referring to a fantasy, a fantasy of ideal Bears and an ideal Bear community.

In addition to this, still concerning the question of how they would define a Bear, two of the interviewees (Artur and Pedro) pointed out a difference between the idea of a Bear from the 1980s and the current reality. Artur reported:

> In the past, a Bear was a man who did not identify with the gay aesthetic and the mannerisms. Originally a Bear was to be 100% masculine. It changed a lot, there are muscle Bears, Bears who do not want to be Bears, more effeminate Bears, with much affectation, who listen to Cher and lots of feathers. Today, Bear is related to the non-identification with the overall aesthetic standard, which is a slim gay man who takes care of his appearance.

From the narrative above, Artur considered that masculinity was an essential attribute for the Bears in the past, but that this idea is not current anymore. On the other hand, Pedro expresses an opposite opinion, stating that non-masculine men are not well-accepted within the Bear community:

> At its origin, [the concept of Bear] comes with a comprehensive proposal, with different body types, other models and sexual practices, other 'sensorialities'[29], other textures. This does not prevent sleeping with thin or muscular bodies. It should be a place of socialization, acceptance and resistance. Nevertheless, the model in Brazil is quite the opposite. Feminisms and gender expressions are repelled. People want to find heterosexual men. It is dumb, segregating, and misogynist. It is not easy to fight against hegemonic models. It is about increasing self-esteem, not a competition.

---

[29] The original word used by Pedro was "sensorialidades", which is also not common in Brazilian Portuguese, so I decided to remain the very literal meaning and put it between quotation marks.

It is interesting to compare the narratives from Artur and Pedro. Although both of them state that Bears nowadays are different from the original idea, they have completely different understandings about this original idea. While the former considers that a Bear originally needed to be masculine, the latter stated that the emergence of the Bear community is associated with inclusivity. It is worth mentioning here that what Pedro said about the non-inclusivity of the Bear community does not apply only to the city of São Paulo. For example, Wright (1997) also stated that although the emergence of Bears in the U.S. is associated with inclusivity; there are some Bear communities in that country that are not so inclusive in relation to non-masculine men.

The second category created based on the narratives of the interviews is related to the fact of São Paulo being a global city. "According to the global city model, the various global cities around the world will become alike, and particularly, that they will resemble New York City" (Sassen, 2001, p. 349). The fact that São Paulo is a global city can be associated with the fact that it is one of the Brazilian cities most likely to absorb and reflect international references, such as the Bear culture – that has its origin in the U.S. For that reason, it is not surprising that São Paulo is a major reference for Bears in Brazil and that two of the three interviewees who are not originally from São Paulo, only came to know Bear events personally when they moved to that city. Felipe said that he came from a city in which there was no bar or events dedicated to Bears; he said that before moving to São Paulo, he already knew the existence through the internet of a Bear bar in the city. Roberto, in turn, stated that he had never heard about Bears until moving to São Paulo.

In addition to this, seven participants stated that nowadays there has been a considerable increase in the number of parties dedicated to Bears in São Paulo. Artur

50

explained that some gay venues, such as Vermont and Cantho, that did not use to have special parties for Bears, started to have a Bear party periodically. Artur also mentioned the existence of Bear parties in gay-friendly clubs, such as D-Edge and Vegas. Bears have gained a considerable popularity in São Paulo's nightlife in the last couple of years, and one of the consequences is that Bear events are becoming popular not only among Bears; fact that causes dissatisfaction for some. For example, Felipe told he was disappointed when he went to a gay club that was promoting its first Bear party, because he could hardly see any Bears in the waiting line. He said that he, his friends, and few other Bears who were waiting in line to get into the club, decided to leave the venue, due to the "few Bears that were there".

I turn now to the answers concerning what makes the Bear community different from the broader gay community. For Julio, one of the most marked characteristics of the Bear community is the fact that "everybody seems to know each other, especially in social networks. It seems superficial. It seems there is no privacy and everything is connected, and I think it is because of the social networks". The importance Julio placed on the internet can be related to the emergence of the first Bear groups in Brazil. Artur and Armando, who claimed to take part in the first Bear meetings in Brazil in the mid-1990s, both stressed the importance of the internet helping Bears to get acquainted. "We used to use IRC[30]. The Bear community has all been built online. Many people did not use to attend gay places, many of them were not out, and they came out online". The use of the internet enabling Bears to meet is not only related to the Brazilian reality, but it is also associated with the emergence of the Bear phenomenon in the U.S., as mentioned by Wright (1997) and Suresha (2002).

---

[30] IRC (Internet Relay Chat) refers to a software for chatting online.

On the other hand, for Carlos, what makes the Bear community different from the broader gay community is the non-exclusion of fat people, "different from the gay community that is prejudiced, [in the Bear community] you can be yourself, you do not need to worry if your belly is apparent of not". In addition to this, Francisco argues that

Bears do not have to wear fashionable clothes, or hair, or perfume. I do not need to have the typical language of the gay community. I may be fat, but I can also be thin. People are going to beat me because of that statement [laughs]. After all, chasers are part of the Bear community, right? I may be young, I may be old. I can hear both new and old music, which does not happen in the gay community. I can be apart from the prejudices and desires of the gay community in general.

The answers above from Carlos and Francisco express that prejudices for being overweight are not found in the same way within the Bear community and within other gay communities. In the Bear community, it seems there is a greater acceptance of being not thin, or not having a toned or muscular body. Besides this, the narrative of Francisco also mentions issues of age; it suggests that in the Bear community there is also a greater acceptance of older gay men. Slevin and Linneman (2010), on their work on old gay men's bodies and masculinities, point out that although old gay men might experience at times a double stigmatization, the Bear community seems to be a welcoming place for them:

The bear community rejects the strict body norms (washboard abs, hairless torsos) that the broader gay community tends to value. Therefore, it should be no surprise that some old gay men find the bears a welcome respite, as their aging bodies will be treated with a greater level of admiration than elsewhere in the gay community. (p. 504-505)

52

One of the images associated with Bears is that of mature and older men, as stated by Leandro, "What attracts me most in the Bear community is that Bears provide me a feeling of safety and maturity". On the other hand, Pedro mentioned that because the Bear community welcomes older gay men, it also attracts many gay men who got older but never took part in the Bear community and do not share the same values as its members. "Old queens that can no longer keep fit and start to go to Bear parties. Older *barbies*, that cannot keep the same body, are stocky, and pass for muscle Bears. All this is sad. I am sorry for all this" (Pedro). Thereby, Pedro's statement suggests that the Bear community represents a welcoming space not only for Bears and chasers, but also for older gay men who are not Bears and do not share the same values as the members of this community.

Although the Bear community seems not to have the same prejudices as the broader gay community, for example against overweight and older men, this does not necessarily mean that there are no other types of prejudice. Carlos pointed out, "Those who were excluded in the past started to exclude now the muscular men, the skinnies, the effeminates. It is a dictatorship on the other side, of fat and hairy men." Felipe, in turn, stated, "That is why Bears are a much closed community; they do not accept this feminine gay aura. Prejudice exists on both sides: against fatties in gay parties and against thin men in Bear parties." It is important to observe here that at the same time that Bears are associated with inclusivity (Wright, 1997), there is also an idea that they are a closed community, where thin and effeminate men may not fit (as stated by Felipe and Armando).

In addition to this, still related to the idea of Bears being a closed community, Artur expressed that "it is more common that a Bear likes another Bear than a chaser. It is autophagy; attraction and dating occur within the group". Artur was referring to the fact that

it is not rare that Bears have relationships and sexual relations mostly with other Bears. As it is also stated by Leandro, "I believe many Bears are very elitist, they only like Bears, at least most of them are like this; few of them have a relationship with non-Bears".

Another category created based on the narratives of the interviews concerns the idea of assuming being a Bear and liking Bears (being a chaser). Felipe states that "Bear is a lifestyle, you assume being a Bear." On the other hand, Julio reported that he used to like to go to Bear parties, but he used to be ashamed to tell that to his friends, "Until one day that I ended up assuming liking Bears." Since the idea of assuming being a Bear or a chaser has similarities with the idea of assuming being gay, Martin (1997) and Hamelin and Langway (2010) also refer to it as a coming out. It is possible to observe that coming out as a gay, Bear, or chaser all involve following non-hegemonic models; while assuming being gay represents being engaged in same-sex relations, assuming being a Bear represents being different from traditional gay stereotypes, and assuming liking Bears represents admitting the attraction to non-traditional gay stereotypes (Martin, 1997, p. xx). Besides this, Hamelin and Langway (2010) consider that men who assume being a Bear or a chaser are coming out of their second closets – being the first closet related to assuming being gay – and, therefore, having their "second coming out".

4.1 Chapter's conclusion

Having presented the categories from the interviews with the members of the Bear community of São Paulo, it is worth summarizing the most important points before moving to the next chapter. It was possible to observe that, as already stated by Wright (1997) and Suresha (2002), the definition of a Bear is not unique and comprises a number of meanings,

depending on each community and even on each individual. In addition to this, it was demonstrated that São Paulo being a global city with a prolific gay scene is associated with the fact that the first Bear meetings in Brazil took place in this city and also to the fact that nowadays São Paulo is a major reference for the Bear culture in Brazil. In the past couple of years Bears gained popularity in São Paulo and the numbers of parties dedicated to them has increased. Nowadays Bear parties are found not only in the margins of the gay scene, but also in mainstream gay clubs that did not use to have Bears as their target audience. Moreover, the interviews also indicated that the internet has a central role among Bears. It was through the internet that the first Bear meetings were organized and still today it represents an important means for Bears to get acquainted.

Furthermore, it was observed that although there is no stigmatization of overweight and older men within the Bear community, some participants reported that effeminate and thin men might not be so welcome. The difference between the type of prejudices that exist within the Bear community and within the broader gay community deserves a closer attention. It is possible to consider that although the Bear phenomenon emerges as a response to the "Castro clone" stereotype and comprises different types of masculinities, bodies, and looks; this does not necessarily mean that *any* man is well-accepted in the Bear community. It is not because Bears represent nonconformity to the norms of the mainstream gay world that the Bear community may not have its own norms[31]. In addition to this, the discontent reported by Bears of the Bear community ending up attracting men who got older and do not share the same values as them suggests that the Bear culture is not necessarily a space for embracing marginalized gay men (such as older, overweight, and hairy), but rather a space

---

[31] On the contrary, the interviews demonstrated how the Bear culture regulates and produces a specific type of gender capital, which involves a more rugged masculinity and a hairy and stocky body; issues that are analysed in detail in the next chapter "Masculinities within the Bear community".

for men who share the experience of taking part in a community defined as "Bear"; it is not *any* space, but rather a Bear's space.

Finally, the interviews also indicated that being a Bear or feeling attraction to a Bear is related to the idea of assuming something, having a "second coming out" (Hamelin & Langway, 2010). Here, it is possible to draw a parallel between the representation of gay men and Bears: while gay men can be regarded as "the others" when compared with heterosexual men, Bears seem to the represent "the others" when compared with mainstream gay men. I turn now to the analysis of the notions of masculinity within the Bear community of São Paulo.

CHAPTER 5

MASCULINITIES WITHIN THE BEAR COMMUNITY

> Here is a definition of a Bear. He is a man who
> passes for straight until he gets to the dance floor.
>
> Baus and Hunt, *Bear Run*

"He does not seem like gay", "he is gay, but has a masculine attitude" and "he is a masculine gay guy" are some of the utterances that often seek to express that a man who is gay does not meet the stereotype of being effeminate. Nevertheless, although the expressions "masculine attitude" and "a masculine gay guy" are often heard, they are not so often elucidated. Since masculinity is one of the characteristics associated with the image of Bears, it is important to draw attention to how it is understood within this community. The purpose of this chapter, thereby, is to reflect on and problematize the meanings masculinity has for Bears, more specifically in the Bear community in São Paulo.

The expressions "masculine attitude" and "a masculine gay guy", I consider, have much in common with two other expressions used to describe Bears, namely, as gay men "going natural" (Suresha, 2002) and having "a certain type of attitude" (Hennen, 2005). These two authors present interesting analyses concerning how those definitions employed to describe Bears are often associated with masculinity. The first author points out that when it is mentioned that Bears are gay men "going natural" (Suresha, 2002, p. 16), although this characteristic of "going natural" may have other meanings – such as men who do not care about fashion or aesthetics, wearing generally jeans and flannel shirts –, it may also refer to men having a masculine behaviour. On the other hand, Hennen (2005) states that when it is considered that "a certain type of attitude" is a defining characteristic of a Bear, this attitude,

57

among other possible meanings, can also be related to being masculine, "The masculinity thing" (p. 26).

Hennen (2005) mentions that the masculinity Bears refer to is also associated with heterosexual men and I believe it is possible to relate this idea to the characteristic of "going natural". When it is stated that Bears are gay men "going natural", the word "natural" seems to be associated with appearing to be heterosexual men. It seems to express that some Bears do not have effeminate mannerisms as some gays would do; they are just "regular guys" (Baus & Hunt, 2008), "natural" as heterosexual men. Moreover, it is also possible to infer from the expression "going natural" that a man having effeminate mannerisms or not having a masculine attitude is deemed to be artificial or not appropriate – not "natural".

Similar to these considerations is the analysis developed by Connell (1992) in an article on gay masculinities with a very intriguing title, namely, "A very straight gay". The words used in the title of this article make reference to the following speech of an interviewee, defined as a gay man:

> If you're a guy why don't you just act like a guy? You're not a female, don't act like one. That's a fairly strong point. And leather and all this other jazz, I just don't understand it I suppose. That's all there is to it. I am a very straight gay. (Mark as cited in Connell, 1992, p. 746)

This passage, as well as the expressions "going natural" and a "certain type of attitude", is associated with an essentialist idea of men being naturally masculine; as if there was a logical correspondence between sex and gender (Butler, 1993). Besides this, it is also possible to observe a devaluation of the feminine and that "the choice of a man as sexual object is not just the choice of a-body-with-penis; it is the choice of embodied-masculinity.

58

The cultural meanings of masculinity are (generally) part of the package" (Connell, 1992, p. 746). This citation suggests that for some gay men the attraction for the same-sex person is not only related to the fact of having a male body ("a-body-with-penis"), but rather to the *masculinity* this person has.

From the interviews with the members of the Bear community in São Paulo, it was observed that masculinity comprises a wide range of possibilities and meanings, sometimes even contradictory to each other; topics that will be detailed from now on. The first topic associated with masculinity I draw attention to is body size. When Carlos stated that "a more masculine man is the one who is not so thin", this statement can be associated with the idea of McGann (2002) of having a bigger body represents a male characteristic. McGann (2002) points out that while weight, bulk, and substance are associated with manliness; lightness, loss, and smoothness are expected for women (p.86). Thereby, if a man being stocky is eroticized as more masculine, Bears seem to adequately fit this logic.

Similar to the idea of McGann (2002), Bordo (1993) affirms that compulsive eating is expected from men, that they "are supposed to have hearty, even voracious appetites. It is a mark of the manly to eat spontaneously and expansively" (p. 108). The idea of eating larger meals associated with a male behaviour needs delimitation when analysing Bears. Bears can be eroticized by being stocky or fatter; nevertheless, being a Bear is not about eating at lot in order to get fat as one possibly can. It rather seems that Bears are not about being obese[32] and are not about being thin, but something in between, "natural", as described by Armando.

---

[32] There are other subcultures in which body weight is more specifically valued, such as gay male Chubbies, as pointed out by Monaghan (2005). On his article on fat male embodiment, Monaghan (2005) describes gay male Chubbies as "typically more expansive than Bears, their expressions of self-acceptance are less assured" (p. 87).

The importance of gaining weight within the Bear community is illustrated by the narratives of Felipe and Pedro. When Felipe moved to São Paulo, he reported that he used to feel uncomfortable going to Bear parties, because he was thin and did not have a beard. As time went by and he started to gain weight and grow out his beard, he said he started to feel more accepted by other members of the Bear community. Pedro, in turn, considered that many members of the Bear community are overweight beyond healthy limits: "The Bear community is obese and diabetic. My ex-boyfriend wanted me to get fatter; I said no, I have to lose weight, I am starting to have health problems." Pedro also stated that some people think that being a Bear means to be fat and they start to eat a lot, without taking care of their health, in order to be better accepted in the community.

In addition to this, the idea of gaining weight and its association with masculinity includes also another important aspect, namely, the meanings attributed to hard and soft bodies. Bordo (2000) points out that bodies that are soft are typically associated with femininity, while "the proud, hard body is a metaphor for mastery and power" (p. 49), and regarded as a masculine reference in our society. Bears are much associated with fatter man, but not with soft bodies, as illustrated by Armando, "the belly has a very important role, there is an apparent disdain with it, but it is not a disdain". Armando was referring to the fact that despite Bears appearing to not worry about how their belly looks like, this is not necessarily true; their bellies can be built, they are not so "natural". The images used to symbolize Bears, such as Jack Radcliffe, one of the major Bear icons (Wright, 2001), are most likely represented by men with a hard, rather than soft, belly.

The belly seems to be valued as a specific form of capital, namely, as gender capital. It represents not only something that gives prestige and social recognition to Bears, but it is also associated with a masculine attribute. Armando states that the clothes are worn in a way

60

that strategically places the belly. "Tight pants, but not so tight; baggy shorts, but not so baggy; usually they go under the belly. The belly is very important, men are not ashamed to show it" (Armando). Similar to Armando's comment, Carlos considered that a man taking off his shirt in public, "despite not having a toned abdomen", is a sign of masculinity. Thereby, masculinity seems to be enhanced not only by showing the belly in public, but by showing a non-toned abdomen in public, a "non-hegemonic belly". As illustrated by Armando, "a masculine man is rather a guy who has a natural body, not shaped".

In addition to body size and the belly, another bodily characteristic associated with masculinity among Bears is body hair. When Felipe was referring to one of the male characteristics that most attract him, he stated that "I think it is all about body hair". It is worth pointing out that although body hair is traditionally associated with virility and men's attractiveness (Basow & Braman, 1998; Tiggeman & Kenyon, 1998), we cannot affirm that a hairless body is necessarily associated with femininity. As stated by Vernis & Roll (1970), "The situations in our society in which one see a bare chested male strongly suggest potency (i.e., sports, physical labor, sexual contacts)" (p. 126). Therefore, a bare male body may also represent virility.

Besides this, Boroughs, Cafri, and Thompson (2005), on their empirical research on male body depilation, bring out that in recent years the number of men having their body depilated has been increasing. They state:

> Given the historical emphasis on the relationship between masculinity and the presence of body hair (i.e., some level of hirsuteness), such a shift has importance not only for better understanding the ever changing ideals of attractiveness for men, but also because it sanctions behaviors that were once reserved for women (Boroughs, Cafri, & Thompson, 2005, p. 640).

61

If traditionally body depilation was considered a practice addressed only to women, nowadays men are also the target audience of this practice. And this does not mean that male body depilation is necessarily addressed to gay men, as one could think due to the stereotypical idea of gay men as effeminate. What Boroughs, Cafri, and Thompson (2005) emphasize on the quote above is precisely that men – including hetero, bi and homosexual – having their body depilated disrupts gender norms, by the fact that they are engaging in an activity that was typically feminine. Although a man who does not care about shaving his body hair can be regarded as masculine within the Bear community (Artur, Felipe); the cultural phenomenon of metrosexual men (Simpson, 1994), the professional sportsmen and the gay male *barbies* from São Paulo are examples of the intertwining of depilated bodies and the representation of masculinity.

Another characteristic pointed out by the interviewees related to masculinity is the non-preoccupation with aesthetics. Pedro argues that Bears do not care about fashion and Artur brought out that there are some Bear communities where the members do not use perfume, as it is not considered as "a mark of masculinity". It is important to mention here that although some Bears claim that they do not care about fashion, it does not mean that they do not care about how they look. As already observed in the first chapter, there are some elements of clothing specifically associated with Bears, such as flannel and checked shirts, jeans, caps, suspenders, and boots, which are repeatedly used by many of the members of this community. The range of clothes and accessories of the universe of the Bearphernalia seems to be a form of capital in the field of Bear masculinities, by which men are more easily identified – and also more highly valued – as Bears.

In addition to this, from the analysis of the interviews, the notions of masculinity were also associated with specific sexual acts. Pedro stated that "among some Bears being passive

means to be inferior, it is a sign of shame; when in fact being active or passive should not be related to a certain valuation". The narrative of Pedro has similarities with the conclusions that Kulick (1997) reached in his empirical research with Brazilian transgendered prostitutes, that being passive indicates a behavior that is not proper for men.

> Thus, Kulick argues, gender in Brazilian culture, is defined precisely through sexual acts – or perceptions of sexual acts - in a binary system of men and not-men. This is a system quite different from contemporary U.S. understanding of gender and sexuality which is increasingly formulated around the notion of identity, with sexual preference having no necessary implications for gender. In arguing such, Kulick is making a direct intervention in the discussion of non-normative genders and sexualities in Latin America. (Valentine, 1999)

The quote above suggests that in Brazilian culture the sexual act of being anally penetrated has a major influence on gender. Different from the U.S., where the understanding of gender is more intimately related to the notion of identity, it seems that in Brazil the notions of gender and sexuality are intertwined. Receptive anal sex puts the masculinity of a man at risk; it is a sexual act that is practiced by "not-men" (Kulick, 1997). When making use of this logic to analyse the Bear community, it is possible to consider that as some Bears claim for a more rugged masculinity, being passive may indicate that they are not that manly, and they might be regarded as "inferior" (Pedro).

The work of Halberstam (1998) on female masculinity also reveals valuable insights of the relation between penetration and masculinity. She argues that a body that refuses to be penetrated, even if it is a woman, is regarded as more masculine. Stone butches can be an illustrative case of women who are very masculine and do not receive penetration in their sexual relations. In that sense, Halberstam (1998) points out that masculinity is not

(necessarily) related to the genital sex, but rather to the renouncement of being penetrated. Again here, Bears who claim to be only active seem to fit this logic of being considered as more masculine.

Moreover, the way a man behaves was also interpreted as a masculine characteristic or not by the interviewees. Artur and Pedro both pointed out that a masculine man is someone "who do not have feminine mannerisms". By the answers of the interviewees, feminine mannerisms are mostly associated with the idea of a man gesturing as he speaks and to a man who has a more effeminate voice, as stated by Pedro, "Do you know these guys that seem very *macho* and when they open their mouth they talk like crows?" In addition to this, when seeking to explain what he considered as masculine behavior, Roberto reported that "I do not know how to define masculine … in opposition to feminine, someone who moves away from the feminine. Someone who does not worry about being hairy or not, about aesthetics, it is a matter of attitude."

From the answers of Artur, Pedro, and Roberto, it is observed how the feminine is devalued in relation to the hegemonic masculine and how a feminine behavior can be considered as a non-desirable behavior for some Bears. Besides this, it is curious to notice that a negative definition was used to describe what a masculine behavior is; masculinity was described by what it is not: it is not the feminine.

The concept of masculinity is rather complex to be defined (Gutmann, 1997). Among the eleven interviewees, five of them answered they did not know how to define masculinity. The fact that participants struggled to answer what masculinity is (as I consider almost everybody would do) can be associated with the conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity by Connell (1987). By affirming that hegemonic masculinity works as an ideal to be achieved rather than representing the masculinity enacted by most of men, I consider Connell (1987)

seeks to demonstrate how something (hegemonic masculinity) that is not tangible and not possible to be clearly defined works so strongly in the society as a whole. Maybe answering "I do not know" to the question "What do you consider a masculine behavior?" represents the lack of objectivity of the very concept of masculinity.

On the other hand, when answering what a masculine behavior is, Felipe reported that Bears "naturally" have a masculine attitude:

> The masculine attitude makes the Bears different. It is not that other gay men are not masculine. It is about trying to prove masculinity. A Bear does not need to prove masculinity, because he is already like this. Gays dance Britney and Rihanna, Bears do not. The sexual attraction is to another man.

Similar to Felipe's opinion, Armando reported that masculinity for him is to be identified as a man, rather than as a masculine gay man. "When I go to the supermarket, people see a man doing shopping, they do not seem a masculine gay guy" (Armando). Both the narratives of Felipe and Armando express essentialized and naturalized notions of masculinity. What is interesting here is the fact that masculinity is not an essentialist feature of heterosexual men (as the stereotype might suggest), but rather of Bears. There is a claim for authenticity, as if one type of masculinity would be the authentic (Bear's masculinity), in opposition to other masculinities; "It is not that other gay men are not masculine, but a Bear does not need to prove his masculinity" (Felipe).

Curiously, what Felipe expressed about Bears not dancing "Britney and Rihanna" while "other gays" do, is the opposite of what Baus and Hunt (2008) stated that a Bear "is a man who passes for straight until he gets to the dance floor". In the first case, Bears who do not dance mark their difference from "other gays"; in the second case, Bears who do dance

65

mark their difference from straight men. This may represent the variety of masculinities co-existing within the Bear community. The word "until" in "until he gets to the dance floor" seems to point out that Bears are not about hegemonic masculinity; there is this "until" that differentiates Bears from hegemonic masculinity. At the same time, there are Bears that do not dance, since dancing is characteristic of "other gays", maybe the not so masculine ones.

Furthermore, Augusto and Artur stated that masculinity is not an essential attribute for Bears nowadays. Augusto reported that during the 1990s masculinity was highly valued within the Bear culture, but today "the masculinity issue is decadent". Artur, in turn, pointed out that despite "originally a Bear was to be 100% masculine", this idea has changed a lot, and nowadays there are "effeminate Bears" in the community. Thereby, it is possible to observe that the Bear community is not only constituted by one single form of masculinity, but rather it comprises a variety of masculinities. It includes Bears who dance or not on the dance floor, who talk like crows or with deeper voices, who are passive or active, and who have a "natural" belly or are muscle Bears.

The co-existence of various types of masculinities within the Bear community may represent the existing subfields within the field of Bear masculinity. As any given field, the field of Bear masculinity also involves struggles between dominant and subordinate positions. The elements regarded as more masculine mentioned in this chapter – such as "a certain type of attitude", "gay men going natural", bodily characteristics (such as body hair, belly and being stocky) and the clothing accessories (such as jeans, checked shirts and boots) – seemed to provide a more privileged position to those who have them, representing a form of gender capital. Bears who present this form of gender capital may assume a dominant position in the field of Bear masculinity.

66

Bears seem to illustrate what Coles (2008) argued that "although men may be subordinated by hegemonic masculinity within the field of masculinity, they may assume a dominant masculine identity in an alternate subfield in which the capital that they own is valued" (p. 235). Being homosexual, overweight, older and hairy may be far distant from the ideal of hegemonic masculinity; nevertheless, as these characteristics are highly valued within the Bear community, Bears can experience their masculinities are dominant within the field of Bear masculinity.

The gender capital enacted by Bears provides a higher value not only within the subfield of Bear masculinity, but also in the subfield of gay masculinity and in the very field of masculinity. By having a "more masculine" behaviour, Bears can "pass for straight" (Baus & Hunt, 2008) and, therefore, occupy a more privileged position in the gender hierarchy than those gay men who have "effeminate mannerisms". Thereby, I consider that Bears adequately illustrate the argument of Coles (2008), that by having a dominant position within a certain subfield, men who are subordinated by hegemonic masculinity are able to negotiate their position within the field of masculinity.

CONCLUSION

This research was based on fieldwork with eleven members of the Bear community of São Paulo and does not intend to claim for a generalization for the entire Bear community of this city neither for other Bear communities. Although the theoretical foundation of this research (Bridges, 2009; Coles, 2010) seeks to better understand how the notions of masculinity are reflected in men's lived experience, realities are not possible to be fully grasped and are much more fluid and complex. This study rather aimed to illuminate and problematize relevant issues observed within the Bear community of São Paulo. Nevertheless, São Paulo, as a global city, may reflect not only the Brazilian reality; the characteristics of this community may have similarities with others. For example, the Bear community in São Paulo is similar to the U.S. to the extent that is mainly constituted by gay, white, middle-class men from the urban.

The findings of this study revealed a claim for an authentic masculinity within the Bear culture, which could be observed by the repetitive use of the word "natural" in the discourse of the interviewees. A "natural belly" (Armando) referring to those men who do not struggle to have a toned abdomen. A "natural body" referring to those men who do not struggle to keep fit (Armando) and also to those men who do not have their body depilated (Francisco). "Going natural" (Suresha, 2002) making reference to gay men who do not care about what to wear or to gay men who are not effeminate. Bears as "men who are naturally masculine" (Felipe). The various contexts in which the word "natural" is employed seem to work as a form to validate the claim for an authentic Bear identity and masculinity.

Although there is a claim for an authentic Bear identity, this study showed that there are different versions of the defining elements of the Bear culture. While Bears can be

68

associated with inclusivity, the emphasis on a masculine Bear identity goes in the opposite direction of being inclusive. Furthermore, the results of the interviews demonstrated that there are Bears who are masculine or not, hairy or not, older or not, stocky or not. Since "part of the magic of the Bear label is that it escapes precise definition" (Monaghan 2005, p.86), this research was developed based on the premise of the Bear phenomenon as "a pervading spirit that is often more a shared personal experience" (Martin, 1997, p. xix).

The main contribution of the present study was to apply the theoretical model of the field of masculinity and the concept of gender capital to develop an integrative approach to understand constitutive forces in emerging Bear culture of São Paulo. By presenting a specific form of gender capital, this study demonstrated that Bears adequately illustrate what Coles (2008) argued that some men's "lived experiences of masculinity were not of being subordinated or marginalized by hegemonic masculinity; to the contrary, they considered their own masculinity to be dominant despite being incompatible with, or varying from, the hegemonic ideal" (p. 234). Their attitude (such as "going natural" and "masculine behaviour"), bodily characteristics (such as body hair, Bear belly and being stocky) and elements of the Bearphernalia (such as jeans, checked shirts, caps and boots) provide Bears with valuable capital not only within the subfields of Bear and gay masculinity, but also in the field of masculinity; they "pass for straight" (Baus & Hunt, 2008).

It is worth mentioning that when it is stated that Bears are well-accepted in the straight community, it is not precisely because they are gay, but rather because they do not look like gay, "they pass for straight" (Baus & Hunt, 2008). The discourse of Bears "passing for straight", thereby, also suggests a devaluation and stigmatization of effeminate gay men. In addition to this, the idea of "passing for straight" can be related to the concept of "normalization" described by Foucault (1977). Bears' engagement with hegemonic

69

masculinity seems to reproduce the notions of normalization: what is "normal" for men is to have a masculine, instead of effeminate, behavior. Bears passing as straight also illustrate what Warner (2000) stated, "Homosexuals whose gender conforms more to the norm can often be silently accepted" (p. 37). Since the Bear community, and also the LGBT community, includes multiple masculinities and identities, it is vital that not only Bears who pass for straight, but also different gender identities (including effeminate gay men and many other stigmatized identities) that are not regarded as "normal" could also experience less stigmatization in society.

Finally, studying the Bear culture was particularly relevant because it concerns aspects of gender-political agendas. This study shed light to the way Bears "physically and discursively manage capital field-specifically" (Bridges, 2009, p. 87). The examples taken from the interviews of men growing out their beard, getting fatter and not having their body depilated can illustrate how the Bear culture monitors gender capital. Although the Bear phenomenon is not a political movement, it does have implications for gender politics. Bears contribute to create an "interesting instability" (Saez, 2012) in the gender order, they indicate that gay men may not be feminine. "My husband can be gay, as well as the butcher or the carpenter. Well, we are not safe anymore, anyone can be gay[33]. We Bears create too much chaos in society" (Saez, 2012).

CEU eTD Collection

---

[33] Author's free translation (Spanish-English).

REFERENCES

Adkins, L. (2003). Reflexivity: freedom or habit of gender? *Theory, Culture & Society, 20*(6), 21-42.

Barrett, D. C., & Pollack, L. M. (2005). Whose gay community? Social class, sexual self-expression, and gay community involvement. *The Sociological Quaterly, 46*, 437-456.

Basow, S., & Braman, A. (1998). Women and body hair: Social perceptions and attitudes. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 22*, 637–645.

Baus, J. W. (Producer), & Hunt, D. (Director). (2008). *Bear Run* [Motion picture]. United States: Pear Wolf Productions LLC.

Bears mailing list. (1995). Retrieved 10 March, 2012, from http://www.qrd.org/qrd/electronic/email/bears

Bergman, D. (2002). You can lead a Bear to culture but…. In. R. J. Suresha (Ed.), *Bears on bears: Interviews & discussions* (pp. 25-40)*.* Birmingham: Naworth Press.

Bordo, S. (1993). *Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body.* Berkeley: University of California Press

Bordo, S. (2000). *The male body: A new look at men in public and in private.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Boroughs, M., Cafri, G., & Thompson, J. K. (2005). Male body depilation: prevalence and associated features of body hair removal. *Sex roles*, *52*(9/10), 637-644.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Bourdieu, P. (1993). *Sociology in question.* London: Sage.

Bridges, T. S. (2009). Gender capital and the male bodybuilders. *Body & Society*, *15*(1), 83-107.

Bridges, T. S. (2011). [Review of the book *Faeries, bears, and leathermen: Men in community queering the masculine*, by P. Hennen]. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, *19*(1), 83-86.

Bronski, M. (2002). You can lead a Bear to culture but…. In. R. J. Suresha (Ed.), *Bears on bears: Interviews & discussions* (pp. 25-40)*.* Birmingham: Naworth Press.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of "sex".* New York: Routledge*.*

Cidade de São Paulo. (2011). Retrieved 23 June, 2012, from http://www.cidadedesaopaulo.com/sp/br/sao-paulo-em-numeros

Coles, T. (2008). Finding space in the field of masculinity: Lived experiences of men's masculinities. *Journal of Sociology*, *44*(3), 233-248.

Coles, T. (2009). Negotiating the field of masculinity: The production and reproduction of multiple dominant masculinities. *Men and Masculinities*, *12*(1), 30-44.

Connell, R. W. (1987). *Gender and power: Society, the person and sexual politics.* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Connell, R. W. (1992). A very straight gay: Masculinity, homosexual experience, and the dynamics of gender. *American Sociological Review*, *57*(6), 735-751.

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society*, *19*(6), 829-859.

De Visser, R. O., Smith, J. A., & McDonnell, E. J. (2009). 'That's not masculine': Masculine capital and health-related behaviour. *Journal of Health Psychology*, *14*(7), 1047-1058.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.). (1994). *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. (2003). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials.* London: Sage.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison.* London: Penguin Books.

França, I. L. (2007). Sobre "guetos" e "rótulos": Tensões no mercado GLS na cidade de São Paulo. *Cadernos Pagu*, *28*, 227-255.

Gill, R., Henwood, K., & McLean, C. (2005). Body projects and the regulation of normative masculinity. *Body & Society*, *11*(1), 37-62.

Goffman, E. (1983). The interaction order: American Sociological Association, 1982 Presidential Address. *American Sociological Review, 48*(1), 1–17.

Gray, P. S., Williamson, J. B., Karp, D. A., & Dalphin, J. R. (2007). *The research imagination: An introduction to qualitative and quantitative methods*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Gutmann, M. C. (1997). Trafficking in men: The anthropology of masculinity. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *26*, 385-409.

Halberstam, J. (1998). *Female masculinity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Hamelin, H. H. (Producer), & Langway, D. (Director). (2010). *Bear City* [Motion picture]. United States: Sharpleft Studios**.**

Hennen, P. (2005). Bear bodies, bear masculinity: Recuperation, resistance, or retreat? *Gender & Society*, *19*(1), 25-43.

History of the Bear flag. (2004). Retrieved 11 March, 2012, from http://www.bearmfg.com/history/history.html

Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. (2010). *Censo 2010*. Retrieved 1 June, 2012, from http://www.ibge.gov.br/censo2010/

Kulick, D. (1997). The Gender of Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes. *American Anthropologist*, 99(3), 574-585.

Levine, M. P. (1998). *Gay macho: The life and death of the homosexual clone.* New York: New York University Press.

Martin, T. (1997). Foreword. In. L. Wright (Ed.), *The Bear book: Readings in the history and evolution of a gay male subculture* (pp. xix-xx). Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press.

McCormick, J. (2011). Hairy chest, will travel: Tourism, identity, and sexuality in the Levant. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, *7*(3), 71-97.

McGann, P. (2002). Eating muscle: Material-semiotics and manly appetite. In N. Tuana, W. Cowling, M. Hamington, G. Johnson, & R. MacMullan (Eds.), *Revealing male bodies* (pp. 83-99). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Monaghan, L. F. (2005). Big handsome men, Bears and others: Virtual constructions of 'fat male embodiment'. *Body and Society, 11*(2), 81-111.

Neuman, W. L. (1997*). Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

O'Leary, Z. (2004). *The essential guide to doing research*. London: SAGE.

Parada. (2010). Retrieved 23 June, 2012, from http://paradasp.wordpress.com/parada/

Portelli, A. (1995). *The death of Luigi Trastulli and other stories: Form and meaning in oral history*. Albany - New York: SUNY Press.

Reinharz, S. (1992). The principles of feminist research: A matter of debate. In C. Kramarae, & D. Spender (Eds.), *The knowledge explosion: Generations of feminist scholarship* (pp. 423-437). New York: Teachers College Press.

Rofes, E. (1997). Academic as Bears: Thoughts on middle-class eroticization of workingmen's bodies. In. L. Wright (Ed.), *The Bear book: Readings in the history and evolution of a gay male subculture* (pp. 89-102). Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press.

Rofes, E. (2002). Bears as subcultural subversives. In. R. J. Suresha (Ed.), *Bears on bears: Interviews & discussions* (pp. 13-24). Birmingham: Naworth Press.

Saez, J. (2012, May 7). *Osos, entre la sátira y la reafirmación para entender otras masculinidades.* Address at the Proyecto Nociones Comunes, Traficantes de Sueños Librería Asociativa, Madrid, España.

Sassen, S. (2001). *The global city: New York, London, Tokyo* (2nd ed.). Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press.

Secretaria de Assuntos Estratégicos. (2012). Retrieved 20 September, 2012, http://www.sae.gov.br/site/

Shimko, W. (2002). International Bear brotherhood. In. R. J. Suresha (Ed.), *Bears on bears: Interviews & discussions* (pp. 301-318). Birmingham: Naworth Press.

Shopes, L. (2007). Legal and ethical issues in oral history. In T. L. Charlton, L. E. Myers, & R. Sharpless (Eds.), *History of oral history: Foundations and methodology* (pp.125-159). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Simpson, M. (1994, November 15). Here come the mirror men: Metrosexual men wear Paul Smith, use moisturizer, and know that vanity begins at home. *The Independent*, p. 22.

Slevin, K. F., & Linneman, T. J. (2010). Old gay men's bodies and masculinities. *Men and Masculinities*, *12*(4), 483-507.

Suresha, Ron Jackson. (2002). *Bears on bears: Interviews & discussions.* Birmingham: Naworth Press.

Swartz, D. (1997). *Culture & power: The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tiggemann, M., & Kenyon, S. (1998). The hairless norm: The removal of body hair in women. *Sex Roles, 39*, 873–878.

Ursos. (1999). Retrieved 23 June, 2012, from http://www.ursos.com.br/

Ursos de Pernambuco. (2010). Retrieved 10 March, 2012, from http://www.ursosdepernambuco.com.br/site/

Ursos do Rio. (2007). Retrieved 10 March, 2012, from http://ursosdorio.blogspot.com.br/2007/02/o-que-um-urso.html

Ursound. (n.d.). Retrieved 1 May, 2012, from http://ursound.com.br/modulos/canais/descricao.php?cod=64&codcan=64

Valentine, D. (1999, October). Engendering sexuality in Brazil and the Southern Philippines [Review of the book *Travesti: sex, gender, and culture among Brazilian transgendered prostitutes*, by D. Kulick]. *Anthropological Quarterly, 72*(4), 183-187.

Verinis, J. S., & Roll, S. (1970). Primary and secondary male characteristics: The hairiness and large penis stereotypes. *Psychological Reports, 26*, 123-126.

Wacquant, L. (2004). Habitus. In J. Beckert and M. Zafirovski (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Economic Sociology* (pp. 315–319). London: Routledge.

Warner, M. (2000). *The trouble with normal: Sex, politics, and the ethics of queer life.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

*What is the Bear flag? (*2005). Retrieved 11 March, 2012, from http://www.resourcesforbears.com/faq/#flag

Wright, L. (1997). *The Bear book: Readings in the history and evolution of a gay male subculture*. Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press.

Wright, L. (2001). *The Bear book II: Further readings in the history and evolution of a gay male subculture*. Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press.

Wright, L. (2005). Introduction to "queer" masculinities. *Men and Masculinities, 7*(3), January: 243-247.

APPENDIX 1

ORIGINAL CONSENT FORM IN PORTUGUESE

Eu, José Luís Gomez Gonzalez Júnior, aluno do Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies (GEMMA), venho desenvolvendo uma pesquisa cujo objetivo é compreender através de uma perspectiva de gênero a comunidade Bear. Para tanto, serão utilizadas entrevistas semi-estruturadas, com o propósito de obter descrições do mundo e experiências vividos pelos participantes.

Os participantes não receberão nenhuma compensação financeira ou benefício direto por participarem do estudo. No entanto benefícios podem ser gerados, pois os procedimentos acima referidos permitem a cada participante uma reflexão em torno da experiência em foco, além do estudo poder gerar benefícios para outras pessoas que estejam vivenciando a mesma situação.

O sigilo em torno da identidade e da privacidade dos participantes ficam garantidos por esse termo. A recusa em participar da pesquisa não implicará em nenhum prejuízo ao participante.

O pesquisador coloca-se à disposição, a partir de outubro do corrente ano, para informar os resultados obtidos. Os resultados também ficarão disponíveis na biblioteca da Central European University e poderão ser divulgados para fins acadêmicos.

Pesquisador: José Luís Gomez Gonzalez Júnior
Orientadores Responsáveis: Profa. Dra. Eszter Timar e Profa. Dra. Liamar Durán

Day, Month, 2012

APPENDIX 2

TRANSLATED CONSENT FORM

I, Jose Luis Gomez Gonzalez Júnior, student of the Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies (GEMMA), have been developing a research that aims to better understand the Bear community through a gender perspective. For this, I will conduct semi-structured interviews, in order to obtain descriptions of the world and lived experiences of the participants.

Participants will not receive any financial compensation or direct benefit for participating in the study. However, benefits may be obtained because the procedures above allow each participant a reflection on his/her personal experience. Besides this, the study may also provide benefits for other individuals who are experiencing the same situation.

The anonymity and privacy of the participants are guaranteed by the present term. The refusal to participate in the survey will not result in any harm to the participant.

The researcher puts himself available from October, 2012 to report the results of this study. The results will also be available in the library of the Central European University and may be published for academic purposes.

Researcher: José Luís Gomez Gonzalez Júnior
Supervisors: Eszter Timar and Liamar Durán Almarza

Month, Day, 2012

APPENDIX 3

INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

1. How did you get to know the Bear community?

2. When did you start to go to Bear events?

3. What are the activities and events organized by the Bear community? Which of these events do you often take part?

4. How would you define a bear?

5. Tell me a situation or event where you liked to be part of the Bear community.

6. Tell me a situation or event where you did not like to be part of the Bear community.

7. In your opinion, what are the differences between the Bear community and the gay community?

8. What do you think about the number of members in the Bear community, is it increasing? Decreasing?