

Bombo, Torotot, Tatsing, Ragadak: An Exploration into Funeral Band Members' Lived Experiences

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ABSTRACT

This study is a phenomenological investigation which attempted to borrow the funeral band members' experiences and their reflections towards their personal journey. Specifically, this study explored the funeral band members' lived experiences as well as the benefits they can offer to the bereaved family. To obtain the data needed, this qualitative phenomenological research used a researcher-made questionnaire and limited face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis with the goal of identifying and reporting patterns in the form of themes within the given data set. Braun and Clark's Thematic Analysis was employed to examine the data, in which four themes emerged for "lived experiences" and these are (a) A Form of Escape, (b) Economic subsistence, and (c) Solidarity in Culture. The same findings demonstrated the benefits that a funeral band can offer to the grieving family with the following themes: (a) Greater Positive Emotion, (b) Powerful Social Glue, and (c) Culture and Grief.

Keywords

Funeral Band Members, Lived Experiences, Phenomenology

Introduction

The death of a loved one is so genuine like no other, an experience that goes beyond words. Coping with the loss of a family member or a close friend is one of the hardest encounters that many of us face. Loss is recognized as natural, an ordinary part of life. But it's so intense that we can still be overcome by surprise and confusion which will lead to extended periods of sadness or depression. As time passes, this sadness will fade. But to overcome these feelings, one must undergo the important process of grieving.

Everyone responds differently to death and use personal coping mechanisms for grief. Seeking support from family and friends and drawing comfort from faith are the most common ways of managing grief and loss. These convictions lay the foundation for funeral ceremonies, which consist of very specific actions performed in a precise order: namely, a ritual. Funeral rituals are considered those events that directly surround the loss and typically encompass notification of the death, a funeral ceremony and gatherings involving food and social exchanges (Whitacre, 2017). Bolton and Camp (1987) considered bereavement rituals to be an important element of the process of saying goodbye to the departed, with the funeral tradition being a principal ritual in this respect. According to Lloyd (1997), the funeral is possibly "the most popular expression

of grief in our culture", and Irion (1991) has argued that "funeral ritual belongs to the very heritage of the human community".

Music is said to allow access to the experience of emotions that have yet to be fully dealt with or processed (Sloboda, 2005). This premise could explain why music has a rather integral part in some funeral rituals. In particular, funeral bands have rich historical tradition of using music for the purpose of processing one's experience of loss and grief.

The intention of this paper is to study and understand the subjective lived experience of the members of Miagao Sporting Band, a funeral band. It is an attempt to borrow the band members' experiences and their reflections towards their personal journey as well as their personal observations of funeral rituals and ceremonies for the reason of obtaining an in-depth meaning and understanding of the significance of their lived experience and their possible contributions to cope with loss and pain. This research endeavour is guided by two research questions namely:

- 1) What is the lived experience of the members of a funeral band?
- 2) How can a funeral band be beneficial to bereavement as observed and reported by the band members?

Parameters

This study is limited only in exploring the subjective and personal lived experience of the members of Miagao Sporting Band. It sought to discover the meaningful journey of the band members. It also aims to describe the benefits that Miagao Sporting Band may offer to the bereaved family and friends from their pain and loss as observed and reported by the band members themselves. As such, the researchers do not intend to ask the family and friends of those who passed away of their perceived effects of music played by the band on their emotional state during the interment.

Research informants for this study are the second generation members of Miagao Sporting Band. These research informants are fifty years old and above and are members of Miagao Sporting Band for not less than thirty years. These criteria are based on the premise that knowledge comes with age and experience.

Informants

Three informants were identified to participate in this study. The researchers did not obtain formal measures of cognitive ability, but at the time of the interviews, the informants were found to be at least of average intelligence as evidenced by their language fluency and comprehension. The informants reported an understanding of the nature of this study and two of them were able to communicate using the English language.

Informant # 1 is 74 years old and has been with Miagao Sporting Band for 58 years. Aside from playing in the band, he also served the community as a former police officer. He earned his degree in Criminology from the University of Iloilo where he enjoyed a scholarship grant as a member of the school band. He has five children whom two of them are also members of Miagao Sporting Band.

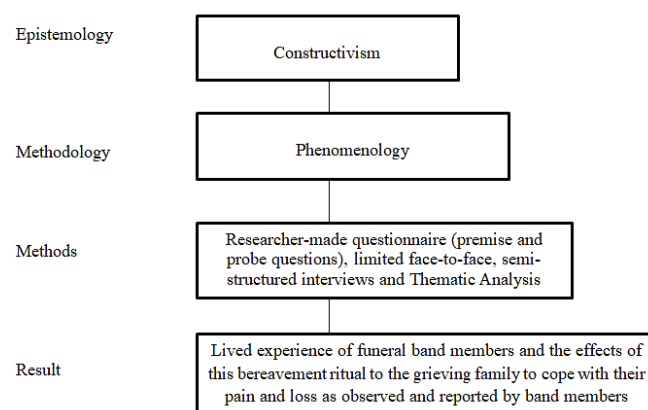
Informant # 2 is a graduate of Commerce at the University of Iloilo. Just like informant # 1, he is also a school band member where he enjoyed a scholarship grant. He spent 59 years of his life as a member of Miagao Sporting Band.

Unlike informants # 1 and # 2, informant # 3 did not obtain a college diploma. Aside from earning a living as a member of Miagao Sporting Band for 60 years, he is also a fisherfolk. He is a son of the first generation member of Miagao Sporting Band.

Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is the examination of consciousness as experienced from the first-person perspective; the emphasis is on how phenomena are lived by each individual (Smith, 2013). It focuses on people's lived experience of phenomena, and by definition, this makes phenomenology the most appropriate research method for this study.

Flow Chart of the Research Process and Method



Data Collection

To obtain the data needed for this study, a researcher-made questionnaire and limited face-to-face, semi-structured interviews which are anchored on the statement of the problem were used. The researcher-made questionnaire contains both close-ended or premise questions answerable by "Yes" or "No" and open-ended or probe questions that sought explanations of answers given to premise questions. This was designed to encourage open-ended responses which led to a far richer and more accurate understanding of the lived experiences of the members of Miagao Sporting Band. Informants were allowed to respond without setting boundaries. Respondents were given ample opportunity to comment, provide insights, explain and share experiences and attitudes that might be reflective of their knowledge and belief. On the other hand, all interviews were properly documented. Health and safety protocols such as social distancing, wearing of face mask and face shield and bringing of sanitizer were also observed during the limited face-to-face interviews to protect both the researcher and informants against COVID-19 virus.

Data from Research Interviews and Questionnaire

Research Question # 1: What is the lived experience of the members of a funeral band?

Main Theme: A Form of Escape

The informants shared their experiences when they were asked how they started and what were their reasons in joining a funeral band. All of them replied that their primary reason why they joined a funeral band is to escape extreme poverty.

Informant # 1 said that “During my high school days, my former uncle Jose Novilla, a composer and an arranger encouraged me to learn note reading and to play musical instrument. If I had never been a member of the band, maybe I could hardly pursue my study in college because of low family income. Being a band member, I obtained scholarships at the University of Iloilo and enjoyed free tuition, exempted from ROTC and PE”.

Informant # 2 described his experiences as “Ang mga musiko naga insayo kada Sabado kag Domingo, naka interes ako sa pag-pamati sang ila mga tukar kag nag hambal ako sa akon kaugalingon nga mag tu-on man kung paano magtukar kang instrumento. Kag na kumbinsi man ako mag intra para maka bulig sa akon pamilya ky kami pobre lang”. (Band members are having their practice every Saturday and Sunday and I got interested to listen to their music and told myself to likewise study how to play musical instrument. I was also convinced to join the band so that I can help my family financially because we are poor.)

Informant # 3 discussed his experience and mentioned that “Ang kaimulon guid and nag duso kanakon nga mag sulod sa Miagao Sporting Band. Si tatay ko man ang nag impluwensya kanakon nga mag banda kay miyembro man tana kang Miagao Sporting Band”. (It is poverty that pushed me to join the Miagao Sporting Band. It was my father who influenced me to join the band because he is also a member of the Miagao Sporting Band.)

Researchers' Interpretation

Members of Miagao Sporting Band have enjoyed a number of benefits, from reducing financial burden of a rising costs of a college education to exemption in subjects such as ROTC and PE.

Being in the band can give members financial support needed to take a leap and enroll in a college degree, as well as a boost to members' morale and confidence in their ability to work towards a better future. Overall, Miagao Sporting Band plays an important role in making education more accessible and affordable, paving the way for band members to be successful both in the completion of their degree and their pursuit of a happy life. It is therefore very evident that the primary reason for these informants in joining Miagao Sporting Band is to escape poverty.

Main Theme: Economic Subsistence

Here are the informants' responses when asked about the benefits they have received from joining Miagao Sporting Band.

Informant # 1 divulged that “Joining the band is very beneficial. It helps me to earn an extra income to support my educational needs as well as the necessities of my family such as food, clothing, and medicine, among others”.

Informant # 2 went on to state “Ang akon benepisyo nga nakuha bilang isa ka musikero, kada may serbisyo may partida ako nga kwarta. Naka free tuition man ako sa Miagao Vocational School kag amo man sa University of Iloilo. Tungod kadya nakatapos ako kang kurso nga Commerce, naka kita kang nami nga ubra kag naka tabang sa akon pamilya”. (The benefit I get for being a musician is the monetary share. I also had free tuition at Miagao Vocational School and at University of Iloilo. Because of this, I was able to finish my course which is Commerce, able to find a good job and helped my family.)

Informant # 3 went on to insist that “Bahol guid ang natabang kang banda labi na guid sa pinansyal nga kinahanglanon kang akon pamilya. Nabuligan ko patapos ang akon mga kabataan sa kolehiyo tungod kang Miagao Sporting Band”. (The band has greatly helped especially in the financial needs of my family. I was able to help my children finish college because of the Miagao Sporting Band.)

Researchers' Interpretation:

While it is unlikely that a member will become wealthy by joining the Miagao Sporting Band, the extra income they received is already more than enough for them to provide their family with the basic necessities of life and send their children to school. People who decided to learn how to play

an instrument can use this skill and knowledge for the rest of their lives. The informants in this study are living proof that joining a band offers incredible opportunities.

Main Theme: Solidarity in Culture

One area looked into in this inquiry was concerned with the contribution of Miagao Sporting Band to the culture and heritage of the people.

Informant # 1 articulated that “Ang pumuluyo kang Miagao mga relihiyuso kag mapinalanggaun kang musika. Ang kapistahan kang Santa Cecilia, ang Patrona kang mga musikero, gina selebrar kang mga taga Miagao sa bulan kang Nobyembre. Ang presensya kang Miagao Sporting Band ang konkreto nga pamatuod nga manggaranun ang kultura kang Miagao. Gina imbitar guid kami para magtukar sa tagsa ka ti-on nga gina selebrar ang kapistahan ni Santa Cecilia kag amo man ang kapistahan ni Nuestra Senora de la Paz Buen Viaje kag amo dya ang rason kung naga naga tiriripon ang mga tawo para magselebrar kag magkasadya. (The inhabitants of Miagao are very religious as well as lovers of music. The feast of Sta. Cecilia, the patron saint of musicians is celebrated by Miagaowanons in the month of November. The presence of Miagao Sporting Band is a tangible proof of the richness of the culture of Miagao. We are always invited to play our music during the celebration of the feasts of Sta. Cecilia and Nuestra Senora de la Paz Buen Viaje and this is the reason why people are gathering together to celebrate and rejoice.)

Informant # 2 went on to testify and said that “Gina selebrar ang kapistahan kang Nuestra Senora de la Paz Buen Viaje sa bulan kang Enero. Sa amo ra nga bulan ginahiwat ang novena para magpasalamat sa bugana nga gina dara kang baybay sa mga mangingisda. Gina imbitar ang mga pumuluyo nga mag intra sa novena paagi sa paglibot kang “Higantes ni Gavi” samtang naga tukar kami. Amo dya ang amon kontribusyon sa kultura kang Miagao”. (The feast of Nuestra Senora de la Paz Buen Viaje is celebrated during the month of January. Novena prayers are being held during this month as a form of thanks giving to the bountiful catch by the fisherfolks. People are invited to join the novena through the parade of “Higantes ni Gavi” (two giants sculptured from wood) while we are playing our music. This is our contribution to the culture of Miagao.)

Researchers’ Interpretation

The band members’ involvement in Miagao Sporting Band was gradual. All three informants began to develop an interest in music at an early age. Their involvement in the band was a combination of social interactions, socio-economic aspirations and shared musical interest. Band members also note the cultural relevance of music. For the informants, the crucial aspect of music is its significance as a substance to form a social identification. It provides an important sense of belonging. For band members, it is their ultimate goal to produce music with the capacity to touch lives.

Analysis of the Themes for Question # 1

The theme “Solidarity in Culture” supports the findings of Andsell (2014) who said that bands help generate pride in a place and community, helping to transform an area into somewhere people want to live and feels safe and connected in. The author further explained that listening to band’s music has been shown to create a sense of group identity and may be particularly potent in bringing about social integration. Meanwhile, the themes “A Form of Escape” and “Economic Subsistence” as reported by the researchers are supported by the findings of Corenblum and Marshall (1998) who claimed that socioeconomic reasons can also affect a student’s participation in a band program. The authors further stated that socioeconomic level could predict student retention in music classes.

Research Question # 2: How can a funeral be beneficial to bereavement as observed and reported by the band members?

Main Theme: Greater Positive Emotion

Informant # 1 spoke of his observation stating, “Kapira mn ako magkumpanyar sa lubong nga wara ti banda pero lain guid tana kung may dyan ky naobserbahan ko nga mas mag-an ang baratyagun kng mga tawo kung makabati kang amon tukar.” (For several times, I was able to attend funerals without a band but it’s really different if there is one because as what I have observed, it lightens the people’s emotional state hearing us play.)

Informant # 3 continued to reflect on the benefits of having Miagao Sporting Band during funeral

and said that “Gapati guid ako nga bulong ang amon musika kay sa pira ko ka tuig nga naga tukar sa patay kag bilang sara man sa mga namatyan kang himata, na obserbahan ko nga daw hindi mo makitaan ang mga tawo ti kasubo luwas lng guid sa rapit nga himata kng namatyan.” (I really believed that music is a form of medicine because for several years that I have been playing in a band during funerals, and as the one who also experienced the loss of a family member, I have observed that people do not really lament except for the close relatives.)

Researchers’ Interpretation:

Loss and sorrow are inevitable parts of human life and throughout time people have used music to facilitate the healing process. In accordance with the responses of the informants which are anchored on their experiences as band members for more than 30 years it is very clear that music is one of the most powerful tools in times of loss to the point that it can influence people’s emotional state. Miagao Sporting Band’s initiative of making music for others can help bring people together in their grief.

Main Theme: Powerful Social Glue

Informant # 1 responded by saying, “Hindi ko ma eksplikar pero naobserbahan ko nga mas raku ang mga naga tambung sa lubong kung may banda kumpara sa wara. Daw paryo lang nga may tipon-tipon kang mga magparyentihanay sa lubong mismo.” (I can’t really explain why but as what I have observed, there are more people who are attending the funeral if there is a band playing. It’s just like having a family gathering on the day of the funeral.)

Informant # 2 spoke of his observation. He said that “Daw nagapang imbitar guid ang amon tukar sa rason nga mas raku ang mga naga kumpanyar labi na guid ang mga kaparyentihan kang nagtaliwan. Ako nagapati nga mas makapamag-an kang bu-ot kang namatyan ang raku nga tawo kay nagapakita dya nga raku ang nagapalangga sa napatay”. (The music we are playing seemed so inviting the reason why more people are attending the funeral especially the relatives of the one who died. I personally believe that the number of people attending the funeral lightens the heart of the bereaved family because it shows that the one who died is love by many.)

Researchers’ Interpretation:

There is a strong manifestation that the presence of Miagao Sporting Band can attract more people to attend the burial ceremony that eventually leads to a collective grieving. The support and connection that people provides can create an atmosphere of dignity, respect and acceptance to the bereaved family. The band allows the grieving family to maintain a sense of hope in the midst of loss, while acknowledging the importance of togetherness in times of difficulty.

Main Theme: Culture and Grief

Informant # 1 discussed his observation. He reported that “Ang Miagao Sporting Band nanging parte run kang manggaranun nga kultura kang Miagao. Ang Miagao Sporting Band nagatugro kang dugang nga kolor sa mga nagkalain-lain nga okasyon, sa ti-on man kang kalipay tulad sang birthday, kag amo mn sa ti-on kang kasubo tulad sang lubong. (Miagao Sporting Band has been part of the rich culture of Miagao. The band gave additional color to the different occasions, during happy celebrations such as birthday parties, and also during sad moments such as funerals.)

Informant # 2 shared his observation and claimed that “Para kanakon hindi kumpleto ang ritwal kang paglubong kung wara ti tukar kay parte run dya kang pagpangabuhi kang mga Miagawanon. (For me, funeral ritual will never be complete without us playing because it is already part of the lives of Miagawanons.)

Informant # 3 reflected on the benefits of Miagao Sporting Band, stating, “Nasubu-an ako manumdum nga gamay nalang nga mga pamatan-on ang gusto magsulod sa banda kay nanging parte run dya kang tradisyon kang mga tawo kang Miagao labi na guid sat ti-on kang paglubong. (It’s sad to think that only few teenagers want to join the band because it’s already part of the tradition of the people of Miagao especially during interment.)

Researchers’ Interpretation:

While death is universal, the behaviors associated with expressing grief are very much culturally bound. All cultures have developed ways to cope with loss. Different cultures greatly affect people’s perception and views about life and death. Consequently, bereavement and funeral practices tend to vary from one culture to another. In each culture, death is always associated with rituals and customs to help people cope with their

sorrow. It is clear from the responses of the informants that music played by a funeral band can offer people ways to process and express their grief.

Analysis of the Themes for Question # 2

During bereavement, individuals need a mechanism to adapt and accept loss. Bottum (2007) believed that the loss caused by death is central to humans and has a powerful influence on human experiences. Findings of this research support the study of Worden (2002) who claims that bereavement pathology seem to be less common where there is cultural mechanism to accept and deal with the impact of loss and grief than when there is an absence of such mechanism. The theme “Greater Positive Emotion” was generally supported by the findings of Bottum (2007) who said that grief without a public outlet and mechanism to deal with the impact is dangerous and unhealthy to individual’s physical and mental well-being. According to Rando (1988), burial and funeral rites help families confront the death of loved ones and begin the grieving process. Rando further explained that rites and rituals have remarkable therapeutic properties. This findings support the theme “Culture and Grief.”

Recommendations

1. The appreciation of Miagao’s cultural heritage that includes Miagao Sporting Band should be communicated through an integrated education approach. Inclusion of instrument playing as well as music note reading should be included in the DepEd’s curriculum is highly recommended.
2. Miagao Sporting Band can be considered as a dying culture. There are only less than 20 members who are still active with the band. The oldest member is 75 years old while the youngest is 42. To be kept alive, tangible cultural heritage must remain relevant to a culture and be regularly practiced and learned within the community and between generations. Transmission of this culture from one generation to another through recruitment of new members is significantly recommended.
3. Local Government Unit of Miagao is encouraged to strengthen its commitment towards the preservation as well as the revival

of the dying cultural heritage of the Municipality of Miagao which includes the Miagao Sporting Band. They are advised to formulate policies and programs to perpetuate this culture by purchasing musical instruments as well as to provide for the financial needs of trainers and trainees.

4. A longitudinal study would also be interesting, checking the bereaved family of their personal lived experiences of how Miagao Sporting Band helped them to cope with their loss and pain.

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