



**BSc in Psychology**  
**Department in Psychology**

Players' perspectives on locker room  
culture in Icelandic football

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### **Foreword**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the BSc Psychology degree, Reykjavik University, this thesis is presented in the style of an article for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.

This thesis was completed in the Spring of 2022 and may therefore have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The thesis and its findings should be viewed in light of that.

### Abstract

The main goal of this study was to get the perspective of football players from the top league in Iceland on the so-called "locker room culture". Through the emergence of the #metoo movement and reports of sexual scandals connected to the Icelandic national team in 2021, locker room culture has been widely discussed although studies disagree on definitions of the term. Participants completed qualitative unstandardized interviews, then analyzed by the researcher. Findings revealed five main results. That "locker room culture" can be negative but also positive. Leaders strongly affect the culture in each team. Locker room culture has progressed fast in the last few years in a positive way. Football is a homogenous culture with women and minorities still on the fringes, but individual footballers do not conform to one stereotype. Players feel they do not have the space to share emotions that might go against the norm and are afraid of being not accepted. Changes need to be made and educating and guiding athletes can construct a more inclusive type of leaders and culture. Everybody should be supported in football, also those who experience weakness and being low at times.

*Keywords:* football, locker room culture, toxic jock, athlete, masculinity, leadership

### Útdráttur

Markmið þessarar rannsóknar var að fá sjónarhorn íslenskra knattspyrnumanna úr efstu deild á „klefameningu“. Með tilkomu #metoo hreyfingarinnar og skýrslum um kynlífshneyksli tengd íslenska landsliðinu árið 2021 hefur klefamening verið mikið rædd þó rannsóknir séu ekki sammála um skilgreiningar á hugtakinu. Þátttakendur luku eiginlegum óstöðluðum viðtölum sem rannsakandi greindi síðan. Niðurstöður leiddu í ljós fimm megin niðurstöður. Sú „klefamening“ getur verið neikvæð en líka jákvæð. Leiðtogar hafa mikil áhrif á menninguna í hverju liði. Búningsklefamening hefur þróast hratt á síðustu árum á jákvæðan hátt. Fótboldi er einsleit menning með konur og minnihlutahópa enn á jaðrinum, en einstakir knattspyrnumenn falla ekki að einni staðalímynd. Leikmönnum finnst þeir ekki hafa svigrúm til að deila tilfinningum sem gætu farið gegn venju og eru hræddir við að vera ekki samþykktir. Breytingar þarf að gera og að fræða og leiðbeina íþróttamönnum getur byggt upp tegund leiðtoga og menningar án aðgreiningar. Það á að styðja alla í fótbolta, líka þeir sem upplifa á köflum slæma tíma eða veiklyndi.

*Lykilord:* fótboldi, klefamening, eitraði íþróttamaðurinn, íþróttamaður, karlmennska, leiðtogahæfileikar

### **Players' perspectives on locker room culture in Icelandic football**

Male bonding in locker rooms has been widely discussed in the media (Rhodes et al., 2020). Yet, few studies have been completed given the discussion worldwide. Nonetheless, recent studies disagree on defining "locker room culture" and what stands behind the term. The term is most often associated with behavior related to men and, in most cases, athletes and refers to the way they speak (Curry, 1991) in general. They naturally speak differently to each other than in a more diverse group of listeners. When locker room culture is addressed, it is not only some behavior that only occurs in the locker room. It can take place anywhere. It is crucial to be aware of how masculinity can spread in many multiple directions and that everyone is responsible for shaping gender attitudes in many ways (Messner & Sabo, 1990).

Gender is one of the first social categories children understand in today's societies. Therefore, gender stereotypes are visible from early childhood and adulthood (Steffens & Viladot, 2015). The concept of *masculinity* is constantly changing, and the definition nowadays supports the idea that there are multiple ways to be masculine (Brannon & David, 1976). Masculinity can reach extreme, as well. It is known as *hypermasculinity* or *hegemonic masculinity*, but the terms are considered outdated roles based on society's perspective (Mosher & Sirkin, 1984; Zernechel, n.d.). This role includes imperatives surrounding aggression, risk-taking, and rejecting feelings for pain or injury that seem to have fueled the "toxic jock" identity (Connell, 2001; Messner & Sabo, 1990; Weinstein et al., 1995). Based on Pascoe's (2003) interviews with twenty high school boys, his study findings indicated that those labeled as jocks tended to participate in specific sports that reinforced these behaviors, such as football, soccer, basketball, and wrestling. This research concentrates only on soccer athletes in the Icelandic top division and on understanding the toxic jock model and its behavior in "locker room culture".

Previous studies have been paying little attention to devoting to the identification of contrasting sport-related identities. "Athlete" and "jock," for example, are often treated or

used as the same in everyday speech (Barber et al., 2001; Miller et al., 2005; Miller, Melnick, Barnes, et al., 2006). Recently, a couple of studies (Miller, Melnick, Farrell, et al., 2006; Miller & Hoffman, 2009) have separated those identities as two different things. By doing so, implications are considered for athletic experience, gender norms, and health-risk behavior. Miller (Miller, 2009) conducted the most comprehensive research in this field, looking at the differences between jocks and athletes. Five hundred eighty-one undergraduate students who were active in sports participated by answering a questionnaire. When jock and athlete scale scores were subcategorized into discrete high and low groups, 18% of respondents identified as "jocks," whereas 55% identified as "athletes". This conclusion supports the claim that jocks may well constitute a specialized type of athlete.

The findings on the differences between jocks vs. athletes were that the jock identity was defined by broad adherence to typically male normative attitudes to aggression, dominance, risk-taking, and sexual promiscuity, according to self-reported jocks. Self-identified "athletes," on the other hand, did not support any of these norms. Indeed, the single common ground between jocks and athletes was a heavy emphasis on winning. In contrast, hegemonic masculinity is a foundational component of its identity and possibly an even more crucial factor than a desire to engage in the sport.

Miller and Hoffman's (Miller & Hoffman, 2009) study also needed to divide athletes from jocks or the opposite. Findings indicated that prosocial traits looked more representative of athletes than jocks (athlete mean = 4.18, jock mean = 2.86), and risky masculinity characteristics were perceived collectively as more expressive of jocks than athletes (jock mean = 4.07, athlete mean = 3.41). Only 12% of respondents matched the "jock" requirement, whereas 43% could be categorized as "athletes" in the same approach.

Locker room talk is not only limited to locker rooms; it is also present in our politics, educational institutions, and service industries. Sexist attitudes are prejudiced and discriminating attitudes toward women that stereotype women in roles that are often seen

negatively (Baker, 2015; Malamuth & Donnerstein, 1982). Young men rely on peers when it comes to information about sex. Their primary source of sex knowledge comes through friends and media above all else. A study of 6000 college students discovered these findings (Sprecher et al., 2008; Twenge et al., 2015).

According to masculine ideology (Flood, 2008; Murnen, 2000), men's motive for engaging in these types of conversations, such as "locker-room talk," is to sexually degrade women, possibly doing so to increase their own status among other men (Gilmore, 1995; Ridgeway & Diekema, 1992). However, research on male communication and how it promotes masculine status has shown mixed evidence that degrading women improves men's standing in other men's eyes. Consequently, it seems that boys get most of their sexual activity material through their peers rather than from sources that may represent more mature and nuanced insights on sexuality.

Madalynn Marrone linked how boys' socialization might lead to a hegemonic male gender identity, leading to men engaging in locker room talk. Society instills in young boys the belief that being feminine or possessing female traits renders them weak, inferior, and undeserving of authority (Amin et al., 2018). If young boys are allowed to engage in harmful behaviors and they are excused, simply because of their biological sex, these youngsters are given the message that there is "only one way to be a man" (Marrone et al., 2019).

In one study, a participant-observer, a senior varsity player, a non-participant observer, and a sports sociologist gathered locker room talk fragments over several months. Field observations, detailed interviews collected the data, and life histories were integrated. Findings were that competition strongly affects fraternal bonding and that antisocial language is reinforced by peer group dynamics. Men aim to engage in discussions that support conventional masculinity to avoid insults and criticism. That concludes that their locker room talk treats women as objects and encourages sexist attitudes.

Additionally, in the worst case scenario, it promotes a rape culture. It supports conceptions of male privilege and hegemony. It is likely to impact young men, making that worldview appear normal negatively. The typical idea of masculinity does not match with student-athletes who both want to be masculine and have a successful relationship with women (Curry, 1991).

In high-performance sports, psychological safety has been a rising interest in recent years (Taylor et al., 2022). Niels Feddersen (2021) claims that the modern football environment should prioritize psychology. Not by placing psychologists on a pedestal and allowing them to decide how performance should be developed, but by supporting all other roles in the environment. Working closely with the coach and the physiotherapist, a sports psychologist may significantly influence multiple subjects on and off the field. According to recent research, 20-30% of elite athletes suffer from depression, anxiety, eating disorders, or other mental health issues. With growing attention to mental health, conversations or brief questionnaires are important to check in with athletes (Feddersen et al., 2021). The Football Association (FA) reports that one out of every four players will face mental health issues in any given year (Football Association, n.d.).

Results show that many practitioners apply constructs without a solid foundation of declarative knowledge to make judgments about why or why not, when or when not, they would be appropriate for that specific circumstance (D. Collins et al., 2015). How does the coach handle selection or crucial challenges if the athletes are told that psychological safety is essential for their experience? Furthermore, how does the athlete react when their performance is evaluated? Also, if a lack of psychological safety improves performance, how is this addressed? (D. Collins et al., 2012; Kuettel et al., 2022).

In a study conducted in 2019, the purpose was to address incivility in sports. They investigated the effects of leader incivility toward players on the team and its performance. As predicted, the results revealed that the best mediators were team cohesion and

psychological safety. If the leader had incivility, several implications could suffer; team cohesiveness, psychological safety, and objective team performance. The researcher's implications emphasize civility among leaders, developing organizational rules to prevent incivility, establishing reporting mechanisms, and implementing interventions and training (Smittick et al., 2019).

The researcher received data from the Icelandic Players' Association. The survey was of players in the first team regarding violence in football and has not been published but has been presented to KSÍ (Knattspyrnusamband Íslands (The Icelandic football association)). The researcher will only reveal answers from Icelandic male players playing in the top two divisions. One question asked participants whether they had experienced some of the 13 categories of violence in their sports activities in the last 12 months. Of these categories, mental abuse scored the highest. Of those 19 participants who answered *yes* to experiencing violence, only two of them said they had sought help. Participants were asked where the violence had taken place. Most of them said in the locker room, on the field, and in training. Participants were asked what was common in conversations within the sport. It turns out rough humor, humiliation, contempt for women, and appearance prejudices in this order scored the highest. One question asked whether players knew where to go if they experienced or witnessed violence in sports, 73.18% of participants answered *no* (Leikmannasamtök Íslands, personal communications, 7th of March, 2021).

This study intends to answer whether male athletes consider themselves a part of a toxic locker room culture in their group sports environment or if it is an exaggerated claim. The researcher chose this subject because he is a very sport-oriented person and the discussions of these issues are relatively new to him and society. Currently, this is a huge topic in Iceland, and KSÍ has been under heavy pressure due to the work ethic of the KSÍ board and the sexual scandal of the players (Júlíusson, 2021; Rafnsson, 2021). As a result, the chairman of the Icelandic football association, resigned as well as the whole board. However,



it is not known how the football players themselves feel about this issue and whether they agree or not that the culture is as toxic as some people claim.

The main goal of this study is to help clarify "locker room culture" to the general public and what it entails, as well as to understand why some boys grow up and become stereotypes of toxic jock models who engage in "locker room culture", wherever it occurs. The researcher hypothesizes that participants disagree that Icelandic football culture has a toxic locker room culture. Only because their minds do not define the term broadly enough, conducting open interviews with soccer athletes will lead to good reliability for the results of this study. Hopefully, after this study, a better understanding of the term will emerge and how players feel about the culture, and in the end, there will be another and better name for "locker room culture".

## **Method**

### **Research design**

This study was qualitative, and interviews were semi-structured and unstandardized. That means the results are subjective and variables cannot be numerically defined. The main objective was to better understand locker room culture and toxic jock identity and get the viewpoint of male soccer athletes, what they think about these concepts, and what they think of society's opinion on these concepts. If they disagree, it is essential to get their perspective and have a discussion. If they agree that there is a toxic locker room culture, how can society make the situation better for future generations?

As the study continued, variables became more critical factors in this study. The most significant factors were how experienced the players were and whether they had been playing games or not for the Icelandic national team. The independent variable was male football players who had played at least 50 games in the Icelandic top division. The dependent variable were age, residence, the number of clubs played for, national games played, ethnicity, religion, political views, and parenting club.

The purpose of a qualitative methodology is to understand and describe certain social phenomena, which in this case is locker room culture (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The researcher understands the participants' perspectives, where the emphasis was placed on factors such as events, emotions, behavior, perception, hopes, and expectations (Jónsdóttir, 2012). The researcher himself is the measuring instrument, and his role is to collect data without influencing the participant with his views (Esterberg, 2002).

A grounded theory methodology was used. It provides guidelines on identifying, making links, and establishing relationships between categories. It provides a psychological framework for understanding the subject under investigation (Willig, 2013).

### **Participants**

Nine participants participated in this study. The selection criteria for participants included the following requirements. They had to have played at least 50 games in the Icelandic top division. The players interviewed were 22-39 years old (mean = 31,6), focusing on male players of Icelandic origin. The interviews were collected at a location chosen by the participants and were recorded on a voice recorder. The main factor in research ethics for this study was to maintain confidentiality. The participants' names were altered. Soccer athletes were the following:

**Helgi Ragnarsson**, under 27-years-old male player with under 250 games played according to KSÍ games.

**Pálmi Jökull Sigurðsson**, over 27-year-old male player with over 250 games played according to KSÍ games.

**Snæbjörn Olgeirsson** over 27-year-old male player with over 250 games played according to KSÍ games.

**Ómar Ingason**, over 27-year-old male player with over 250 games played according to KSÍ.

**Hlöðver Guðmundsson**, over 27-year-old male player with over 250 games played according to KSÍ.

**Sigurður Jónsson**, under 27-year-old male player with under 250 games played according to KSÍ.

**Davíð Ingimarsson**, over 27-year-old male player with under 250 games played according to KSÍ.

**Guðbrandur Egilsson**, over 27-year-old male player with under 250 games played according to KSÍ.

**Tryggvi Alexandersson**, over 27-year-old male player with over 250 games played according to KSÍ.

## **Materials**

An unstandardized frame of questions in a qualitative interview was used in this study (see appendix A). Some questions may not have been asked, and others may have been added after the participant's narrative to maintain a solid flow and rhythm during the interviews. The question frame was created and documented in February of 2022. All data was recorded on a voice recorder app on a mobile device. The narratives of the participants were then noted down and interpreted.

## **Procedure**

Interviews were conducted between March and April of 2022. The date and locations of the interviews were mutually agreed upon between the participants and the researcher. All interviews were anonymous, recorded without breaks on a mobile device, and conducted face to face. The length of the interviews varied between 16–54 minutes ( $M = 33$ .min).

## **Analysis**

Following each interview, all data were recorded and transcribed verbatim in a document on a computer. Meaningful and relevant findings were highlighted and noted during the data entry process. As the number of interviews increased, the emphasis shifted to

common findings among the participants. A couple of themes emerged throughout the progress, answered and diagnosed in the following results.

### Results

#### **Locker room culture occurs in Icelandic society, and football is no exception.**

The hypothesis suggested that locker room culture exists in Icelandic football. The findings indicate that the null hypothesis was rejected, and the hypothesis was confirmed. Furthermore, the locker room culture exists in Icelandic society among men. All participants recognized the culture in a specific form and considered it unacceptable in some cases, and older generations followed the culture. Among football players in Iceland, there is a lack of diversity in teams and staff members, which leads to a homogeneous culture.

#### **What is locker room culture from the players' point of view?**

The main conclusion was that the term is viewed negatively, and they disagree that this is the reality of their culture. Pálmi stated: *"I would say the culture is not for everyone."* Two answers were very accurate. Hlöðver talked about what players allow to be said in communication between people and claims it depends on who is in charge, in most cases, the coach or the key character in the locker room. Locker room culture is the culture that exists in any group at any given time. Guðbrandur stated:

*Locker room culture is what is formed when the team has been together for a long time, and there is a certain trust between the players and certain things that we think are right in a locker room that is not right elsewhere, in conversation or jokes or something else. It is formed out of the trust that is within the group.*

Results indicate that bonds and proximity among many men create a culture or environment, and also, it is crucial how the leadership is handled and who stands behind it.

On the other hand, they all agreed that locker room culture has more bright sides than negatives, although they said there will always be plenty of both, which will never change.

Most participants said they experience locker room culture, in a positive way, and the number

of clubs they have played for is close to 100 if the clubs of all the players are calculated together.

### **Does the term “locker room culture” have a common definition ?**

Participants answered the question: What do you think about the general discussion about locker room culture? The results were one-sided. Footballers imply that people claim the term to be highly damaging. It is based on a lack of knowledge. They also feel disappointed that the only people who get to talk about it are people who have not experienced it. As Hlökkver stated: *"It is based on generalizations about everyone and not those who should take the blame."* As society stands today, players are afraid to talk about how they feel or how to talk about this matter because they think they will be “buried alive” by people who strongly suggest their culture is disgusting. Few participants said it is vital that this conversation was to be had; the experience of those who have been in locker rooms is needed. It can not only be individuals who have not had the experience of locker room talk and just read about a violent issue and then start tweeting about it. The result is that the term is considered harmful when footballers think it should also be seen as positive, and the reason for it is their experience in it, not others' ideas about it.

### **Football player as a stereotype**

From the player's viewpoint, the footballer stereotype is not correct. When they are not on the field, they believe the public thinks they are idiots. For example, Guðbrandur stated that *"there was no question about how different footballers are, as there are many of them."* Others said that footballers had been categorized all under the same category built on few occurrences. It got worse with the new situations that have emerged in the organization of KSÍ. The situations that the Icelandic Football Federation (KSÍ) has been through the last few years have been drastic. These cases include violence, sexual offenses, and the dismissal of the chairman. Players talked about that; some years ago, national team players were considered heroes, but it has completely turned around with a change in attitude among the public. They feel prejudice

towards footballers who are not related to that kind of behavior. Younger players are more focused on going abroad to professional leagues than in the past. The players were less ambitious, reaching far back then. The locker room culture was more about playing well and partying simultaneously.

### **Change of attitude, now and then**

Older participants all talked about how the locker room culture had changed very much since they were youngsters coming into the locker room, compared to how these older players welcome youngsters now. Pálmi described how time has changed from his experience at the time, 5-10 years ago. Back then, there was an utter bullying of older players towards younger ones. Older players ruled everything, and the younger ones just had to do what they were told to do. Circumstances are changing because now older players are taking younger players and protecting them. Older players on training camps dragged young players to brothels and forced them to participate in newcomers' ceremonies very demeaningly. Some of this is still ongoing today, but it is not as brutal as it was. Based on these results, football athletes seem to be aware that welcoming young players and letting them sync in and feel welcome is more important than showing them a lesson on how to be a man or how masculinity is supposed to be.

In conclusion, Davíð finds people rather sensitive and thrives in an environment that many find negative. He stated: *"This is very personal, and I can imagine it does not suit everyone."* He talked about his experience with the locker room culture during his career. He said players were demonizing each other endlessly, verbally, and punished, which created a good mood. He realized that there was nothing personal behind it, and what he liked about them was that the players never took anything personally. What he talked about the most was how much he missed more than anything in life was the locker room, being able to hang around with his friends making banter and getting reactions to it. Players in his team called it a "klefastemning" (e. cubicle mood) because it is nice to be a part of it. Davíð argues that boys will always be boys, and it is not the same saying things in a locker room around the same

gender and at the dinner table with parents. Young boys need to learn from their mistakes to grow, and it is healthy to make mistakes.

### **Banter culture**

When participants answered whether they experienced "banter" in football so that conversations revolve around degrading or mocking personality traits was the primary response, as Pálmi stated best: "*Yes, there is much banter, and football has always been that way somehow.*" Hlöðver added that the guys talk in jokes, but it is never known how people will respond to it. Participants majority agreed that wherever they are, in all kinds of situations, in society with only the same sex, all sorts of things get wandered that would not wander when both sexes come together. The matter is that locker room culture happens in plenty of environments, for example, workplaces, classrooms, and sports, and that said, football as a sport and the locker room *per se* is no exception.

Snæbjörn explained that in each locker room, there is a target, and everyone is to a degree. What makes the locker room itself is that everyone is rather open, and this can be on the verge of being disgusting, but players need to be able to take some banter. This competitive environment means that players will have to seek out weaknesses in opponents, whether the opponent is a player on the opposite team or a teammate fighting for a place in the starting line-up. This best describes the image as everyone responded to what banter is in a locker room.

### **Sharing different emotions**

Men who play football for a living are a group of individuals who are very much together in many strange situations. Together in either loss or victory, when emotions get intense. They are together in the shower, locker room, parties, and practices. They are friends, but at the same time in a competition. There are many contrasts there, and all within the same group. At the same time, there must be a good atmosphere and morale. All those circumstances are complicated. Of course, there are conflicts.

The worst element of locker room culture is that players do not have much space to be unhappy. The players do not see the locker room as a safe zone for expressing their feelings, although they are with their friends every day. For example, if a player was breaking up with his girlfriend or is just sad for some reason. Some said that no one would be rude about someone's feelings, but it is not discussed. Gubrandur stated: *"A player who feels bad experiences that he lacks the confidence to share how he feels, it is not tolerated."* Pálmi added: *"No one has come to us from KSÍ and asked if we want to ask to talk about locker room culture."*

### **"Rotten apples" as leaders**

Throughout interviews, participants often mentioned teams where the locker room culture was outstanding, and others talked about the opposite, where toxic locker room culture existed. There was a main theme in all answers. It all depended on which characters led the group, in most cases, the captain, coach, or team leader. That is the main result and most important finding of this study.

Negative leaders get people on board but do not have the personality traits to be good leaders. They lack the strength to fight against adversity, and they fail to shut the hostile players down, and they take over with their toxic banter and negativity. This kind of locker room culture thrives for bringing up problems, raising frustration consistently, and constantly talking behind others' backs. When teams with outstanding locker room culture are compared, they have different leadership. Their leader is respected, and when they talk, teammates listen. In those locker rooms, positive leaders are in the majority. Boundaries are defined, and rules about unhealthy behaviors are apparent. If the majority of leaders in the group are toxic jocks or simply weak, what will occur is that players push the limits. The tolerance among the group for inappropriate behavior becomes more and more toxic. Most participants wanted to emphasize that a significant majority of players they have shared a locker room with are



very physically and mentally healthy. However, there are rotten apples everywhere, because people are different.

### **National team players**

As more interviews were conducted, it became interesting how much players talked about national team players and young professionals leaving Iceland and entering professionals early. The findings indicate that players' skill levels are important. The standard refers to locker room culture based on the level of degree. Davíð was the most experienced Icelandic national team member among the participants, and he stated that there is *"not a place or a time for weakness in the locker room culture. It is about winning games"*. Davíð talked about being with the national team and the boys there being the best life experience he had ever had.

Then Snæbjörn, who had played several games for Iceland, talked about his experience outside the pitch. He felt like every player had a mask on to hide their real feelings, but at the same time, everybody was showing off. He described it as if everyone went "down in maturity" when they came into the national team camps. They think they are allowed to get away with some inappropriate behavior without consequences in any typical environment, and this can worsen if the culture allows it.

### **Dancing on thin ice and crossing the line**

Some participants told their stories involved inappropriate behavior related to their football teammates. Most of them were shocking or disturbing. Sigurður talked about one teammate who was recording himself sleeping with ladies with a hidden camera while they were unaware of the recording. He also expressed a moment when he was very young, with a national team player being his roommate in a football camp who woke him up in the middle of the night, high on cocaine, and threw a party. Sigurður for sure said that these events occurred when he was 18-19 years old, so they had a significant impact on him. One participant laughed as he remembered witnessing a lewd sexual act between teammates on the bus after an away game when everyone was drunk. Tryggvi talked about when he was young, he went with

teammates who were family men and went inside a brothel, and they all had sexual intercourse with sex workers.

Based on participants' responses, participants appeared to understand that this kind of behavior is not for everyone, and it is difficult to identify with those who dislike it or find the behavior uncomfortable. Because everyone wants to fit in, and sports are a competitive environment. Pranks at newcomers' inaugurations can be brutal, and Guðbrandur stated:

*This should be such that you are in a situation where you feel incredibly uncomfortable around the whole team, and when it is over, you cannot feel uncomfortable. The atmosphere in the group is completely different after the inauguration in a positive way.*

### **How footballers talk about women and gay men**

In most interviews, the opinion of the participants was that misogyny and prejudice toward gay men does not exist as a general discussion inside the locker room. However, the same conversations occur everywhere else when friends come together. When it comes to gay jokes or boys talking about how some hot girls are, they are saying: There is no difference in a football locker room, workplace, or wherever they step foot in the community when a group of friends of the same sex comes together. Snæbjörn talked about how if young boys are gay in the locker room, they will not reveal that fact to the others. The players all claimed that gay men exist in Icelandic football. Still, every participant answered that they did not know about anyone playing football in the top divisions. They find it tragic that football as a sports movement allows no one to be gay.

The simple answer regarding the players' attitude towards women's football is better today than before, but it is still not good, and it would be great if things began to improve. The majority of participants confirmed spreading sex stories among their other teammates. Several teams fine their players if they have sex and do not report it to their teammates. Most participants claimed that there are usually two or three people who find themselves talking about sex. Not everyone is open to this. Participants' opinion on what would happen if someone

suddenly revealed their sexual preference or homosexuality, everyone said they would gratulate it with open arms. They hoped the media would take it well and it would get positive attention. It would be a bit of a shock, but the best way it would be, according to them, is to talk about it openly and allow questions to arise.

### **Discussions**

The goal was to find out whether locker room culture exists in Icelandic football, which is the case. This study showed that participants had similar views and experiences regarding locker room culture. This study aimed to explore both perspectives on the topic, from players who experienced locker room culture and, in comparison, examine the public's claim. The study led to five main findings.

Based on previous studies and participants' experiences in this study, the term "locker room culture" is viewed as a negative term. They all recognize the negative meaning of the term but maintain that there are two sides to the coin; that there are also locker room's with a positive culture. A suggestion is made here to divide the term into two themes. Toxic locker room culture versus positive locker room culture (í. eitruð klefamenning / klefastemning). Based on participants' experiences, different leaders have a huge impact on how the locker room culture is (Smittick et al., 2019). The sports movement, clubs, and managers must seek those out who can lead the environment up to reasonable standards and educate players on positive leadership and behavior. In his study, Curry (1991) found out that the competitive environment strongly affects fraternal bonding and that antisocial language is reinforced by peer group dynamics, which supports that leaders must control it. They could start by raising awareness about all of these topics. The locker room culture in Iceland has progressed very fast over the last few years in line with positive changes in society, and that is a good sign for the future. Footballers also want the society to understand that they are not all the same. There are rotten apples everywhere, and they know football is no exception. Marrone's study talks about the message society sends youngsters is that there is only one way to be a man.

The final finding supports that conclusion, with participants expressing that unhappy players were not accepted by their peers in most cases. They do not feel the space to share their fragile emotions (Marrone et al., 2019). In the field of sports psychology, there has been a discussion on psychological safety being an important component of successful teams (R. Collins, 2018; Feddersen et al., 2021). With an educated staff and good leaders, this should not be a problem if players know they are accepted no matter how they feel (Leikmannasamtök Íslands, personal communications, 7th of March, 2021).

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Previous studies on locker room culture have had very similar disadvantages. They often have payment prizes for participants and self-referential questionnaires, and they lack peer conformation. No research included quantitative or qualitative research methods. In this particular study, qualitative methods were used because they are crucial to answering the research question. An insight is obtained regarding what it is like to be a footballer in modern Icelandic society, which is vital for future growth and improvements. The researcher is unaware that other studies have been carried out in Iceland, and there has not been much published on the topic abroad. The main limitation is that the sample size is small, and the results are subjective. Therefore, variables cannot be defined numerically and transferred to the whole population.

The term locker room culture seems to have different meanings to different people. While all the participants understood the term as negative, their experience of locker room culture was positive. The behavior normally associated with locker room culture is rather something they felt happens when men get together in groups and can take place within sports or in other sectors of society removed from sport. So a better and more accurate description might be needed.

**Future directions**

It would be beneficial to have data in longitudinal analyses in this field. Also, samples need to be drawn from non-university populations to have more reliability for generalization. On the other hand, quantitative research is not the best fit for this topic. Footballers in Iceland are very aware of the situation and would most likely not respond honestly if a questionnaire was handed out for this matter due to the issue being delicate. It would be beneficial to do further studies continuing using qualitative research methods. Questions that have to wait for future studies are: Does locker room culture exist in women's football teams in Iceland? What thoughts do managers, referees, and supporters have on locker room culture? If research regarding this matter leads to a better society, most people would consider it worth it and a chance to investigate the topic with relevant improvements further.

According to the results, a change needs to be made in the culture. The main focus should be on finding ways to improve things that could go better. Everybody should be welcome in the football society, not only those who can survive but also those who feel unhappy at some point. Together, we can change the view of the locker room culture term by positively changing the culture. Start by educating the athletes, creating good leaders, and guiding the leaders who lose track. Based on findings, football is aware of the problem of toxic locker room culture and is hopefully heading in the right direction.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Interview frame

1. Viltu byrja á því að segja mér aðeins frá þér?
  - a. Bakgrunnupplýsingar
    - i. (aldur, kyn, búseta, menntun)
    - ii. Í stuttu máli. Hver er bakgrunnur þinn í knattspyrnu?
2. Hvernig upplifir þú viðhorf almennings gagnvart knattspyrnumönnum? Hvernig er ímynd ykkar í samfélaginu?
3. Hvernig er stemningin almennt í þínu liði?
  - a. Er öflug liðsheild eða eru klíkur innan liðsins? Bæði?
  - b. Geta menn sagt sína skoðun innan hópsins?
  - c. Sitja allir leikmenn við sama borð innan félagsins? Gilda sömu reglur fyrir alla leikmenn?
  - d. Leyfir þjálfarinn leikmönnum að hafa skoðanir og tjá sig opinskátt?
  - e. Ríkir umburðarlyndi gagnvart ólíkum skoðunum á dægurmálum og stjórnámálum?
  - f. Upplifir þú „banter“ innan knattspyrnunnar, þannig að samræður snúist um að lítillækka eða gera grín að persónueinkennum?
4. Hver er skilningur þinn á því sem er í daglegu tali kallað *klefamenning*? Hér er ég að spyrja um skilgreiningu, s.s. hvernig myndir þú útskýra hugtakið *klefamenning* fyrir einhverjum?
5. Hvernig hefur þú upplifað menninguna í kleanum í knattspyrnu á þínum ferli?
6. En hvernig er menningin almennt í liðinu utan klefans?
  - a. Hittast menn utan knattspyrnunnar? Í hvaða aðstæðum þá?
7. Hvað finnst þér um almenna umræðu um klefamenningu?
  - a. Les upp skilgreininguna eftir svar þeirra:
8. Hvað fannst þér um þessa skilgreiningu?
9. Hefur þú upplifað aðstæður í knattspyrnunni eða utan hennar með liðsfélögum?
  - a. Þar sem upp komu aðstæður sem þér þóttu óviðeigandi?
  - b. Þar sem upp komu aðstæður sem ógnuðu líkamlegri eða andlegri heilsu einhvers?

- c. Þar sem þú þurftir að gera eitthvað sem þú sérð eftir í dag?
  - d. Hefur þú varið einhverja hegðun liðsfélaga eða vinar sem þú sérð eftir að hafa gert í dag?
  - e. Þar sem einhver viðstaddur eða fjarverandi hefur verið niðurlægður eða gert grín að viðkomandi vegna
    - i. Kynþáttar
    - ii. Kynhneigðar
    - iii. Líkamlegra einkenna
    - iv. Annars
10. Hvernig er viðhorf og umræða til kvenna innan knattspyrnunnar?
- a. Hvernig er til dæmis viðhorf og umræða um kvennaíþróttir?
  - b. Hvernig er til dæmis viðhorf og umræða um opinberar kvenpersónur?
  - c. Eru menn að deila kynlífssögum í klefanum eða vinahópum?
  - d. Hefur þú orðið vitni að dreifingu eða sýningu nektarmynda (af konum eða öðrum) innan knattspyrnuliðs og grunað að það væri ekki með samþykki viðkomandi?
11. Þekkir þú einhvern karl sem er opinberlega samkynhneigður í íslenska knattspyrnuheiminum?
- a. Ef svo er, hvernig eru viðbrögð þín og annarra við því?
  - b. Hvernig væru viðbrögð í þínu liði ef einhver kæmi út úr skápnum?
  - c. Hvernig væru viðbrögð fjölmiðla eða áhorfenda?
12. Er eitthvað sem þú vilt koma inn á að lokum?