

## *Chapter 6*

### **PORTUGUESE YOUTH'S DISCOURSES ON MASCULINITY: BROKEN SILENCES**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The argument about the mechanisms through which people live in a gendered society may give rise to different opinions concerning the perspectives and possibilities of their renewal. Behind this phenomenon is a false clairvoyance in how we understand gender. This certainty about a gendered society has generated uneasiness; within academia it drives a ceaseless inquiry into how to make sense of this omnipresent characteristic. For many years, the focus on gendered societies has not included men. Drawing on the idea of “male normalization”, the invisibility of a prevailing power was promoted. In this hegemonic configuration, men have directly benefitted from a patriarchal model without questioning it, without intervening in an attempt to undermine and consequently destroy it. Nonetheless, the social and political transformations initiated in the mid-19th century had an impact on masculinity studies, making room for a change in expectations and rights. According to this perspective, the changes brought on by modernity have made it possible to rethink the concept of masculinity. Within this context, we strive to shed light

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on the discussion and problematization of the logics of masculinity, as they are understood by Portuguese youth, as part of two research projects separated by a 10-year interval. By studying juvenile narratives we intend to understand how these logics, which appear tied to different meanings, interact. In this regard, we propose to reflect on the discourses produced on implicitly imposed invisibilities, and the way in which these are beginning to be interrupted through an openness to multiple configurations (allowing a metamorphosis) and encourage the visibilities of the multiple ways of being a man.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the following pages we strive to reflect on some elements of the meaning given to the multiple configurations of masculinities, through the discourses produced in two research projects developed with youngsters, in two different time periods. Therefore, throughout this chapter we intend to discuss and problematize the logics of masculinity, which Portuguese male and female youngsters organize based on their everyday lives, trying to understand how different views of masculinities endure and coexist. Namely, we strive to shed light on approaches that assume a plasticity of reorganizations and multiple forms, which persist and interact at the same time and seem contradictory, but actually reflect the complexity of modernity.

Firstly, we propose to share some of the conclusions drawn from an exploratory research project (carried out between 2017/2018) integrated into a wider study, whose main goal is to describe the practices and meanings of homophobic bullying by looking at Portuguese students. From the abundant material that we have gathered, we will highlight the conclusions pertaining to the construction of the idea of masculinity and the body. Drawing on a qualitative methodology, we have opted for the focus group technique. Due to its interactive character in the communication between the elements of the group, this technique promotes the kind of in-depth analysis that is necessary if

we want to understand a socially constructed reality and the way it is interpreted by young people (Vieira, 2012). In this regard, several authors have defended that group interactions make it easier to understand the many different perceptions and experiences (Fern, 2001; Ibañez, 1992; Krueger, 1991; Stewart *et al.*, 2006). To prove this, we can state that the discourses produced in a group, in a space of “group opinion”, allowed these young participants to express themselves and use their freedom of speech – a way of sharing their ideas, regulated by the interactions, dynamics and synergies established within each group (Delgado & Gutiérrez, 1994). In this context, there were five focus groups (three groups composed of boys and girls; one by just boys; one by just girls), with ages between 13 and 16 years old (enrolled in lower secondary education in 2017). During the focus groups six images were presented and discussed (in three sheets of paper, each one containing two photos grouped by different categories, related to the subjects under discussion<sup>2</sup>).

Secondly, whenever the data allows it, we will compare the discursive logic with another study from 2007/2008, which also used the focus group technique (six mixed groups) with young adults (from now on this is how we will refer to them, not only to differentiate the two studies, but also because these were older subjects). They were between 17 and 23 years old and were enrolled in college or vocational schools in Portugal. With a 10-year interval between them, we will try to highlight the changes and continuities, focusing especially on the issue of masculinity. In this context, we strive to discuss and problematize the logics of masculinity, as they are understood by youngsters in their everyday lives, showing how different meanings interact simultaneously and even paradoxically.

Essentially, this chapter intends to focus on the concept of masculinity as an object of theoretical thought and problematization of “what it is to be a man”. As a way to guide our line of thought on this issue, we can state that

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<sup>2</sup> Below we will contextualize and describe the presented images, as well as explain the goal of our analysis.

whatever the answer to the question of “what it is to be a man” may be, it will have to be grounded on social construction. Anchored in this assumption (and without having an immediate answer to this question, since we intend to answer it throughout this chapter), for the time being we will draw on the existentialist thought of Simone de Beauvoir, who defends that our existence does not guarantee that we “are a Woman” or a “man”, but a “non-predefined Being”. In this regard, and adopting a famous sentence immortalized by Simone de Beauvoir,<sup>3</sup> we can state that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a man”, i.e. it is through experiences that one “becomes a man”. According to this line of reasoning, people become men or women through a process of socialization, which guarantees the promotion of attitudes seen as appropriate for each sex. In other words, based on the different forms of organization of life in society, patterns of behavior will be created that tend to reproduce gender stereotypes (both male and female). On the argument of these organizations of gendered life, there are different opinions regarding the possibility of their renewal. This is explained by the fact that there is a false clairvoyance in terms of how we understand gender, which classifies people based on the way they act, move, and present themselves, among others.

This certainty about a gendered society has generated uneasiness; within academia it drives a ceaseless inquiry into how to make sense of this characteristic, which emerges as omnipresent in societies. For many years the focus on gendered knowledge was directed at women, since researchers saw them as “strange” and in need of an explanation, but recently they started giving due importance to the knowledge about men –viewing them as subjects with interest and meaning. For a long time, this “male normalization” was conducive to invisibilities. Nonetheless, transformations to the political, economic and social background in the last 50 years regarding the causes of feminism and human rights has influenced the studies on masculinity and the lives of men in general. In other words, the changes of modernity (intensified in the 1960s, in

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<sup>3</sup> “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” (Beauvoir,1981).

the West, and more specifically in the 1970s, in Portugal) had an impact on the lives of women and men, namely in terms of expectations, rights and gender relations (Vieira, 2003; 2012; 2017), with the emergence of new conditions that allow us to reflect on the concept of masculinity. Even though the concept of masculinity, in its genesis, was anchored in the conviction of unity, permanence and continuity, today it is part of a wider range of views and possibilities, appearing reorganized in the plural, even when there are prevailing patterns.

### **THE MALE BODY - DISCOURSES ON ITS CONSTRUCTION**

The body is also an indispensable place in the construction of masculinity (Connell, 1995). For this reason, drawing on a social analysis, we must first try to understand a man's body and its relation with masculinity. The meanings and symbols that act in the body manifest a body constructed according to a need to relate to the "other". In this way, the body appears as a domain that is constructed with the goal of making it an "acceptable" object in other people's eyes (Vieira, 2012; 2016). This is a *reflexive body*, molded in modern society and expressing self-reflexive narratives (Giddens, 1997). Therefore, through the constructed body, people show how they see themselves and relate to each other. Socially informed, it is a place of domestication and *taming*, according to the attributes of the prevailing order.

Based on a discipline, the body lets itself be regulated, reproducing current global social trends. With this goal, we asked youngsters to comment on an image containing two photos of the same man, a young model advertising household products.<sup>4</sup> He is presented bare-chested, with well-defined pectoral and abdominal muscles. We intended to invite boys and girls to interpret images that circulate in the public space (outdoor media, magazines and TV). In this context, we realized that the discourses marked the representation of the

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<sup>4</sup> Butter and laundry detergent.

modern man: lean and muscular. They presented these highly-valued characteristics with comments pertaining to current beauty standards.

*Moderator - “Well, hmm, what do you think when you see a picture like this, what is the first thing that comes to your mind?”*

*G1F5:15<sup>5</sup> - “[...] We immediately think that the boy is attractive and has a nice body.”*

*Moderator - “[...] Why do you think he has a nice body?”*

*G1F5:15 - “Because of his abs.”*

*G1F1:14 - “His muscles.”*

*G1 F4:14 - “They’re well-defined.”*

[...]

*G1F6:14 - “[...] To highlight [...] the good parts.”*

*G1F1:14 - “[...] Not to mention that boys like this only think about going to the gym.”*

*Moderator - “[...] Yes, and why do they go to the gym?”*

*G1F5:15 - “[...] Because they have created these beauty standards and everyone wants to be like this.”*

*Moderator - “[...] Tell us about that beauty standard.”*

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<sup>5</sup> Subtitle (G1F5:15): G1 identifies the group - in the specific case it corresponds to group 1. For a better interaction and integration of the young people, the chairs were placed in a circular shape. Thus, F5 refers to the sex of the participant and the position she occupies in the circle (according to the hands of the clock, counting from left to right), in the specific case it is female (F) and occupies place 5. The number that appear at the end reflect the age of the young person - in this case 15 years of age.

GIF5:15 - “For example, a boy with a six-pack will be more social than someone without. Now almost everyone is like that.”

GIF4:14 - “[...] That’s what we were just talking about, when I said that there are girls, for example, who start dating a boy not because they really like him, but because of this. Because they look like this.”

We realized that these discourses show that the body is a central component of modernity. It has acquired an omni-relevant status (Edley 2017), given the centrality that it occupies in the day-to-day lives of these youngsters. The ideal body is mesomorphic (the athletic body is a reference in sports and pop music) and through it young people reproduce the canons of bodybuilding – one of the boys stated that he was not envious of the body shown in the image, since he was very close to looking the same.

Similarly, youth’s discourses from 2007/08 denote values that are inherent in the “normalization” of bodies with aesthetic goals, revealing male and female stereotypes. Their discourses expose a male body based on *performance: bulky and muscular*. Therefore, when one youngster asks the following question to his sister: [...] “*what about your colleagues, what do they look for in a man?*” the answer suggests the reproduction of the expected ideal of masculinity, namely when she answers: “*Tanned, muscular, light eyes*” [...] (G2M3:25). In the same vein, as anticipated, the female body is described as *beautiful, round, curvy and sensual* (G6M3:22).

Consequently, we observe that the consumption of a deliberate strategy of aesthetic performance endures. We should add that these young adults still believe in the *democratization of plastic surgery* (Lipovetsky, 2000), confirmed by the narratives about changing their breasts, legs, belly and teeth (dental implants). Here is the example of a young girl who intends to undergo plastic surgery: *I’ll have plastic [surgery] ... I won’t put silicone; it’s about fixing [...]*

*my breasts ... not changing them; it's fixing. [...]. It's not because I'm vain... I won't make my lips plumper or anything. This is an actual need... (G5F4:21).*

Moreover, their discourses show that what is at play in this seductive body are mechanisms of discipline, submission and regulation that serve to reshape the body. Following a logic of rejuvenation, they construct an identitarian model that abides by the imperatives of youth and thinness. Oriented by the modern anti-ageing normativity, these young adults express disapproval towards certain characteristics of the ageing process, namely flabbiness. Boys, as well as girls, are guided by the maintenance of a young and svelte body, reproducing the aesthetic principles that underlie modern society.

Related to the new “needs” and practices of contemporary Western societies, we find the idea of a tanned body – presented by a young adult as an essential element of seduction, especially when it comes to impressing women.

*G2M3:25 – I'm usually very pale, as you can see, even more than this sometimes, but this summer I went to the beach a lot and, since I got really tanned, I was very successful with women. [...] Like really tanned ... I'm not making things up or anything, I'm pretty sure that was the reason.*

### **Hair Removal: A Male Practice?**

Within the body-seduction paradigm, associated with symbolic asymmetries that attribute differentiated meanings to the male and female body, boys admit that they adopt “new” behaviors, such as taking care of their image, which they believe reflects a current trend in Western society. This allows us to conclude that in today's society, we are confronted with a relational body that is moving away from a “naturalized” reproduction. In the discourses about the practice of hair removal among men, young adults mention their difficulty in coordinating these new imperatives (body hair removal) with the internalized

representations from the recent past. Nonetheless, they justify this behavior within a hegemonic idea of virile masculinity, since these new practices, which used to pertain to the female body, are now associated with forms of consumption that are specifically male. This can be seen in the following discussions:

*G3M5:20 – A man... A man who likes that treatment, like a woman ... Well, not like a woman, because it's not a treatment that is specifically for men or women.*

*G3M1:21 – You can't say that's a gay thing.*

*G3M3:21 – We agree on that.*

[...]

*G3M4:19 – In the past, men didn't use to care about these things. They looked like big apes, with their chests and backs covered in hair.*

*G3M2:18 – Those were real men... now they don't care about that anymore...*

[...]

*G3M5:20 – It's perfectly normal... To take care of how you look regularly...*

*G3M4:19 – I'm for that... I don't know.*

*G3M5:20 – Now we see that more and more...*

[...]

*G3M3:21 – I wax.*

*G3F5:19 – And put moisturizer on...*

*G3M4:19 – And face masks once in a while, and a skin treatment. I don't think there's anything wrong with that.*

*I think that if everyone did the same, if they took care of themselves, that would be a good thing... it's not hard to maintain.*

Socialization imposes limits and discipline, however, giving rise to constraints that encourage or discourage these youngsters, drawing on impositions related to each gender (Bourdieu, 1999). In these discourses we find a binary thought about gender image, a well-defined barrier, where the absence of hair is associated with a body represented in the feminine. This can be understood in the following discourse by a girl, which is immediately reinforced by a young boy's:

*G3F5:19 – A man should be hairy; if he removes too much hair it doesn't look nice. [...] Without any hair, he isn't a man, he's a woman.*

*G3M2:18 – We used to say that real men had beards. Now we don't care much about that...*

[...]

*G2M3:25 – A hairy woman is not attractive at all, for example.*

### **Social Media Are Fueled By Beauty Canons**

In a group discussion with the youngest participants about what they see as beauty standards, they mention the need to follow and promote the aforementioned canons of beauty so as to remain more social on social media (namely Instagram). On this issue, a 15-year-old girl mentions:

*GIF5:15 - “For instance, a boy with a six-pack will be more social than one without.”*

Social media are omnipresent in these youngsters’ lives and emerge as decisive tools in their romantic relationships. For example, one girl mentions that a motive for beginning a relationship can be the fact that a boy has many followers on social media. In this way she (in her role as girlfriend) can be rewarded with followers too:

*GIF1:14 - “[...] Ah, because there are many youngsters who have a following, who have a lot of followers on social media and some people [...] want to become popular, so this is a way to achieve that. They try to date those who are popular, who have many followers... stuff like that.”*

In this discussion about social media, we realize that the female body appears instrumentalized as a way to guarantee a desirable increase in the sociability of the girl who shows it. These practices are invested with a double standard – when they come from girls these behaviors are subjected to criticism, while when boys adopt an exhibitionistic behavior (showing off their bodies on social media), it is seen as completely normative. We may conclude that there is a double standard that insists in allowing the male body to be freely used, but continues restraining the exhibition of the female body in the various social spaces – and whenever that situation is countered, the gesture assumes an unseemly meaning.

### **A MAN CRIES TOO?**

The second set of photos presented to the groups intended to encourage a debate about the externalization of feelings through public crying. The two

selected figures shown crying are well-known among the youth: one showed a young singer, Liam, who used to be part of “One Direction”, a very popular band among youngsters; the other showed Cristiano Ronaldo, a world-famous Portuguese football player, who is also very popular among young people.

Upon seeing these images, some of the youngsters’ first reactions is to interpret them as a possible expression of joy. In this way, they associated the images of these public figures with their success, especially in the case of Cristiano Ronaldo, whose crying was linked to him winning the Ballon d’ Or, even though nothing in the image suggested that.

We also concluded that the act of crying was seen as an open display of one’s feelings and sensitivity, among boys and men, as a moral pattern that constrains because it signifies weakness, especially when it happens in public. Nonetheless, the crystallized and socially-accepted view of men as strong and insensitive beings, embodied in the popular saying “boys don’t cry”, is construed by these youngsters as an old idea. Crying is rarely seen in their fathers, but very visible in their mothers. In this regard, a young boy mentions:

*G5M1:14 - “I’ve only seen my father cry once. [...] I’ve seen my mother cry many times.”*

In their narratives, crying was often connected to being away from family and friends (here, one’s peers appeared as an important reference). This was also the explanation given for the “One Direction” pop star’s crying.

*G4 M1:13 - “A tour.”*

*Moderator – “Being away from your family makes you want to cry?”*

*Group – “Yes, it does.”*

*G4 M1:13 - “Family, or the people we love.”*

*[...]*

*Moderator* – “When you are away from people... Tell me. Do you think you would cry if you were away from your family, or went on tour?”

[...]

*G4 M8:13* - “Of course, being away from family and friends is really bad.”

Alongside this, their discourses show an obvious rejection of what used to be a concealed practice in the past, by affirming the act of crying as a human act and, above all, a demonstration of feelings, with some boys admitting to the group that they cry too.

*G1F7:15* - “Boys cry too, they’re human too.”

*G1F5:15* - “Right, that’s what I said. They cry too, obviously. They have feelings too. [...] They get hurt too, they’re sensitive too.”

*Moderator* - “Like girls?”

*G1F1:14* - “Yes. I think it’s absurd, or even stupid, that some boys make fun of others just because they cry.”

## **DOES MASCULINITY INCORPORATE GAY VALUES?**

### **CHANGE SEEMS TO BE UNDERWAY**

The third bloc of pictures presented to the youngsters portrayed people who, in some way, lived outside gender norms, did not fully conform to them, or publicly expressed delicate and fragile mannerisms. With that goal, we have shown two photos of singers who participated and won the Eurovision song

contest: Conchita Wurst<sup>6</sup> and Salvador Sobral.<sup>7</sup> The recognition of these singers, however, was made based on different assumptions. The Portuguese singer Salvador Sobral was immediately recognized by the youngsters because he was associated with a kind of symbol that represents national identity, since he allowed Portugal to win the Eurovision song contest. As for Conchita, youngsters recognized her by the way she presented herself publicly.

Conchita's image always caused a state of confusion. For instance, a boy said:

*G3M6:14 - "At first glance, she looks like... if she didn't have a man's beard, yes, I'd say she looked like a girl. I still say she looks like one, but I lean more towards her looking like a boy."*

In this issue, we should highlight that the first discussions in the groups always started with the youngsters showing some difficulty in classifying this person – we may even say that they revealed the need to categorize him/her according to a natural binary order that divides people between men and women. We cannot forget that for a long time (about two hundred years) dominant discourses circulated that were grounded on binary notions of gender – drawing social limits that define true masculinity versus femininity, objectively distancing one from the other. Therefore, in the discourses of these young participants some behaviors that give continuity to homophobic stereotypes and feelings still endure, in the sense of a masculinity that incorporates heteronormative values. These youngsters classify Conchita in stereotypical terms, as sensual, effeminate, androgynous and perverted in her sexual preferences. In this way, they attribute to the body a kind of space where a set of social, cultural and belongings is inscribed, a body subjected to attempts at gendered modelling.

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<sup>6</sup> Winner of the 2014 Eurovision song contest.

<sup>7</sup> Winner of the 2017 Eurovision song contest.

As for the image of Salvador Sobral, the evaluation was made based on characteristics such as fragility and sensitivity, i.e. body mannerisms that appear associated with gay stereotypes (and their relation with the feminine), and are consequently removed from what they call true masculinity. That is evident in the following dialogue:

*G2M3:14 - “[...] He does this while he sings. I don’t know if you’ve seen it. He sings and puts... It’s weird.”*

*G2M4:15 - “He’s gay.”*

Separated by a 10-year interval, this discourse seems to reproduce the discourses of young adults when they negatively portray gay people as having effeminate traits (physical or social, performing roles traditionally associated with women), and show repulsion for “inverts” and the practice of male homosexuality. In this context, they declare the acceptance of “others” in “their” world, using a terminology that reveals a clear border between “the Other and I” and referring to the issue of homosexuality in a discourse that is external to themselves. See, for example: *“I have nothing against them”*; *“If it’s among them, I don’t mind it”*; *“I’m not like them...”*

This is also the discourse that we hear sometimes in the group discussions of the latest study: *“I find it a bit weird, personally, but I’ve nothing against them”*; *“...as long as he doesn’t hit on me (laughs).”*

Therefore, in both studies, their narratives are similar, giving visibility to homophobic views. At the most, they believe that they accept “gays”, or more precisely “homosexuality”, as an abstract concept – they accept having them as friends and talking to them “naturally” in public.

Nonetheless, we should note that practices (and, consequently, understandings about these practices) are starting to emerge that show a clear difference. In other words, we realize that youngsters are starting to interrupt the silence with the metamorphosis of new masculinities, which appear engaged

with forces that reject the meaning of hegemonic masculinity. In this respect, it was possible to understand that:

– among the young adults from the 2007/08 study, the acceptance of homosexuality and the forging of friendships with gays or lesbians arose as practices that did not belong to them and were more related to a rational choice, to a decision informed by reflection more than a general attitude;

– the youngsters from the 2017/18 study hint at changing views, since the groups talk explicitly about their concrete practices and their friends' (lesbian couples in school). In one group, one of the girls states that she is bisexual:

*G4 F5: 14 - "I'm bi (...) and my boyfriend is bi too. OK, I know another person too. Our union is beautiful, because we fit."*

This situation is new, since it was never found or suggested in the groups from 2007/2008 – at the time they said that if they had a non-heteronormative sexual orientation they would never reveal it, even if they didn't know the other members of the group.

Therefore, we should stress the presence of positive practices and views of lesbian and bisexual homonormative sexuality, even if the same is not true of male homosexuality. In other words, lesbian homonormativity appears through mechanisms of normalization of intimacy, with the acceptance and visibility of lesbian behaviors in school. And even though lesbian and bisexual normativity might initially appear as disruptive (understood as unruly and disturbing, due to the confrontation with something innovative, e.g. the girls described feeling uncomfortable at having to undress in the women's changing room, since that meant exposing their bodies to the possibility of being

eroticized by a colleague's gaze), with time this was resolved. This is demonstrated in a girl's discourse:

*G4F4:13 - "Before, yes, but not anymore. In the changing room it was weird, because sometimes it seemed as if she were looking at us."*

We realize that this lesbian (and bisexual) normativity enters youth's everyday lives through, for example, video games (specifically, *Overworks*). This is mentioned by a boy:

*G2M6:13 - "[...] I don't know, have you ever played Overworks? Have you noticed something? The girl that uses guns? (...) "Teresa. She's a lesbian, for example. That's kind of interesting. Nowadays many companies are putting that in movies and games as a way to reach the new generations with unusual things and that also helps a lot..."*

*This form of transmission of globalized culture is not new in the field of sexuality and it creates styles, patterns and identities in the consumer. And, even though it creates a series of more or less latent inequalities, it also allows us to have a global perspective on current trends, producing new opportunities to transcend the limits and restrictions of traditional demands and expand sexual human rights.*

## CONCLUSION

Despite coming from different time periods, the discursive dynamics presented by the youngsters in the two studies show us that these are not just

stories about experiences and opinions, but manifestations of the social element as the conveyor of ideas and values (Vieira, 2012). Even though the idea of masculinity, in its genesis, was anchored in the conviction of unity, permanence and continuity, what we realize today is that it allows for a broader understanding and possibilities. The concept of masculinity (to which others are associated, for example: “families”; “sexualities”; “femininities”) now appears reorganized in the plural, or, adopting Plummer's (2003) conception, appears reorganized from multiple forms of *being gendered*, even when there are prevailing standards. In other words, the traditional view of masculinity, as a unique quality of the biological, as something constant in man that dictates his behavior, transcending time and space, does not exist (Connell, 1993; Weeks 2011).

Despite this conclusion, we realize that mechanisms of regulation persist in these juvenile narratives that orient the classification of the concept of masculinity as something naturally guaranteed and clearly-defined, with pre-determined representations and practices, which socially legitimize the social organization of a “monolithic masculinity”. What we often see is the orientation towards a biological appearance, both in body and in mind, which is intentionally produced by a long process of *socialization of the biological and “biologization” of the social*. This inverts the relation between causes and effects and determines a kind of *naturalized social* construction (Bourdieu, 1999). In this sense, we realize that the concept of masculinity is still fixed on a false unity, grounded on binary notions of gender, and guided by a focus on the differences between men and women, as if these were clearly-defined realities – excluding all other dimensions of analysis (Collier, 1998; MacLennan, 1998).

We should add that this concept remains fixed to a reproduction of male categories oriented towards the dichotomy hegemony versus subordination, due to the survival of views related to a Gramscian conception (Gramsci, 1971, in McNally & Schwarzmantel 2009). This leads to a ceaseless fight against a

hegemonic masculinity that appears sustained by positions of supremacy, determined by the social structure itself. Within this framework, discourses of complicity emerge, i.e. models of a masculinity that might not stem from a position of power (as the direct authors of gender violence or sexism), but from a position of silence. Therefore, there is a (more or less latent) acceptance of social structures, as a way to benefit from them, which means consenting to the persistence of gender inequality and violence. Following this line of thought, even though, in its genesis, this complicit masculinity is not achieved by violence (but it might be sustained by it), it is reached and dictated through culture (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2013). To reinforce this idea, we would like to highlight that many of these mechanisms of acceptance and persistence of the idea of hegemonic masculinity operate through invisibility, which compromises the possibility of criticism, i.e. the possibility of self-confrontation (Beck, 2000), or the capacity for reflexive monitoring (Giddens, 1997).

Viewed from the construction of an ideal of masculinity, the eroticized body is present in these juvenile discourses – a body institutionalized by heteronormativity, which structures and incorporates heterosexual desires as naturally legitimized. The image of a physically attractive and desirable man, from a sexual point of view, evokes a body that is the object of a sexualized gaze. And that gaze is construed as an object of female attraction. In other words, when young boys and girls see a man posing as a model, in a posture of visible receptiveness invested with an erotic component, they see it as attracting girls and gays.

The discourses of these Portuguese youngsters also hint at values inherent in the sexual “normalization” of bodies with aesthetic goals, revealing male and female stereotypes. Their discourses allude to a male body that reflects “*performance: bulky and muscular*”. It is based on self-image, or on boys’ perceptions of girls’ preferences, a kind of ideal of current trends of Western society. Some of these codes, like tanning and body building, are close to the

canons of Greco-Roman society (frequently associated with a distinction between social classes), which saw in the cult of a tanned and athletic body a sign of masculinity and virility – highly valued due to its relation to the warrior’s body (Vigarello, 2018). And even though, in modern times, a tanned and muscular body is not associated with the warrior, in the sense given by Greco-Roman society, it is highly valued as an important characteristic in seduction – often the meaning given to “true” masculinity appears associated with the body that drives and directs action. In other words, these juvenile narratives show the *body as a sexualized reality* – hostage to an essentialist stance and linked to a certain “natural” order, an ideal of masculinity reflected in a disciplined body. In this way, we realize that it is through the *sexualized body* that one apprehends the social and reproduces the order of the world. This idea is defended by Bourdieu (1999) when he says:

“The social world constructs the body as a sexually defined reality and as the depository of sexually defining principles of vision and division. This embodied social programme of perception is applied to all the things of the world and firstly to the body itself, in its biological reality: it is this programme which constructs the difference between the biological sexes in conformity with the principles of a mythic division of the world rooted in the arbitrary relationship of domination of men over women, itself inscribed, with the division of labour, in the reality of the social order.” (Bourdieu, 1999:9)

In this context, *the body as a sexualized reality* is nothing but a social body that assumes meanings. From the produced discourses the idea of a male body where masculinity is not imparted but received (at least partially) emerges (Connell, 1987).

“In the most extraordinary detail my body’s responses reflect back, like the little mirrors on an Indian dress, a kaleidoscope of social meanings. The body, without ceasing to be the body, is taken in hand and transformed in social practice.” (Connell, 1987: 83).

Therefore, we should note that regardless of the scope of the concept of masculinity, we have fully realized that this lens will have to encompass different dimensions of analysis, and portray the complexity that underlies the liquid, fluid and light configuration of the modern social organization (Bauman, 2001, 2005; Lipovetsky, 2000).

Similarly, but from a reading based on intersectionality, the notion of masculinity should be included in gender relations, where multidimensional interactions linked to differences of power overlap. These are present in the lives of individuals, as well as in institutions, and different meanings emerge from them, which impact both hegemonic and subjected forces.

The different gender organization, dependent on a social, historical and cultural contextualization, should gain new forms, represented by a vision of diversity and acceptance of difference. Based on this metamorphosis, the assumed hegemony should be anchored in human rights, leading to the extinction of intra and inter-gender hierarchies, which promote inequality (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2013).

Centered on the modern paradigm of sexuality and gender identity, conceptions, representations and meanings associated with a plural and heterogeneous masculinity are established. They are represented by subjective logics of construction and reconstruction, which accept diversity as the norm (Plummer, 2003; Weeks, 1985).

It is in this combination of ambiguities – between reason and informed will, founded on the knowledge of modern society, and culture, founded on traditional views – that the idea of masculinity has emerged. Nonetheless, the

knowledge of modern society, assimilated by youngsters, might encourage a change of attitudes and values, shaped by the plasticity of the multiple ways of being a man.

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