OPEN GENDER JOURNAL

Education, masculinities and violence in the National University of Mexico

Mauricio Zabalgoitia Herrera

Abstract: This article is part of a large research project on the various forms of violence encountered in the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). From the standpoint of critical masculinities and some of the basic proposals of feminist research, such as the notion of a continuum and the persistence of sexist structures and harassment practices, a review of the most relevant aspects of three theoretical approaches is attempted: hegemonic masculinity, manhood acts theory, and male peer support. A three-pronged educational model that simultaneously looks at ideals, strategies, and alliances is thus proposed to tackle the discussion on masculinities and lead the struggle against the various forms of violence. Our critique leads to a revision of "multiple masculinities" *vis-à-vis* recent proposals that question the toxicity/positivity dichotomy and advance hybridity as an option. The article ends by outlining the three-pronged model, starting with the strategies of naming and self-reflection.

Keywords: sexism; violence; university; education; critical masculinities
Published: 10 January 2022

Citation: Zabalgoitia Herrera, Mauricio (2022): Education, masculinities and violencein the National University of Mexico. In: Open Gender Journal 6. doi: 10.17169/ogj.2022.199

DOI: https://doi.org/10.17169/ogj.2022.199

Translation from the original Spanish by Luis Esparza Serra. First published: Zabalgoitia Herrera, Mauricio (2022): Educación, masculinidades y violencias en la universidad. In: Debate Feminista 63, 153-176. doi: https://doi.org/10.22201/cieg.2594066xe.2022.63.2325

DEBATE FEMINISTA

The section "Gender-based and Sexualised Harassment, Discrimination and Violence in Higher Education Contexts" is a cooperation between Debate Feminista and Open Gender Journal.

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https://opengenderjournal.de
ISSN 2512-5192

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Introduction

The various forms of violence afflicting the National University of Mexico have been analysed from various perspectives. Critical approaches with a gender perspective adopt a feminist standpoint, overcoming the traditional notion of violence and interrogating the concept of "gender violence" in a male-dominated structure.[1] Several publications attest to the persistence in higher education institutions (HEI) of sexist and male-chauvinistic structures with practices that condition relationships and are taught, learned, and promoted through formal and informal exchanges. A study by Araceli Mingo (2010) provides a detailed panorama of the forms of violence prevalent in the university environment, which range from the invisible and subtle to outright molestation, harassment, and institutionalised violence, including physical violence. In another work on the National University, this author and Hortensia Moreno (2015) come up with a "sexism scale" (Moreno 2015, 141) by which forms of harassment can be measured, from the symbolic to death threats and other strong forms of harassment.

Two main forms of harassment can be identified: the first one entails an instrumental economy operating by way of a "prize-punishment dynamic where 'sexual favours' are exchanged for benefits", and where a refusal can give way to forms of retaliation (Buquet et al. 2013, 302),[2] such as a poor mark, exclusion form a team, obstacles to graduation, etc. The second form of harassment entails the creation of a "cold climate" (Mingo/Moreno 2017, 574), which manifests itself in hostile environments, obscene remarks, and sexually charged attitudes (Buquet et al. 2013, 302). In Mexico, studies on molestation and harassment in the university environment generally consider these practices as part of a continuum in which more complex forms are included, such as the use of force, abuse, rape, and femicide.[3]

1 The complexity of this form of violence based on sexual differentiation has derived in the notion of "gender violence against women". Roberto Castro has referred to the conflicting approaches in academia on the issue of whether gender violence is being singled out to the exclusion of other forms of violence, and whether it all narrows down to "violence against women", which enhances the feminist approach adopted in his study "within the framework of other forms of violence […] being as it is a systemic problem" (Castro 2018, 348).

2 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of quoted material have been executed by the translator of this article.

3 Molestation, and harassment in HEI are considered recurrent forms of violence against women in works such as those of Jorge Salinas and Violeta Espinosa (2013) from the Higher

In general terms and from this perspective, such continuum adopts the form of an uninterrupted gender process (Kenway/Fitzclarence 1997). Laura O'Toole, Jessica Schiffman, and Margie Edwards (2007), on the other hand, maintain that all forms of violence, and not only "gender violence" work to preserve the asymmetry of power structures based on sexual difference. For Nancy Lombard, this continuum can be observed in all societies when feminist theory is combined with the study of masculinities (Lombard 2018, 2).

In the realm of higher education, men are taught to, among other things, practice violent subjectivities through disciplinary regimes with curricular or extracurricular pedagogic dimensions (Waever-Hightower 2011, 163pp.). In the university environment, this continuum operates as a mechanism that leads from the everyday occurrences to the lethal incident, configuring them as practices of male dominance.

In Mexico, a number of studies have incorporated certain basic notions that place hegemonic masculinity under the spotlight.[4] Some studies with a feminist perspective have approached the categories and strategies of masculinity in the academic policies of higher education institutions (Cerva 2018). As for violent practices in HEI, Consuelo Martínez (2019) has looked at the specificity and recurrence of molestation and sexual harassment of female students and professors in the light of Rita Segato's notion of "masculinity mandate". For Martínez, it is from the most basic decisions, such as budgetary allocations, that violent practices against women are systematised in the university environment, "dislocating and undermining the communal organization of students who question, point, and denounce" such practices (Martínez 2018, 117). Segato's proposal, indeed, opens a close dialogue with some of the on-going research projects on masculinity studies when she shows how the pyramid-like structures and hierarchies that deepen inequality and sustain power relations are based on masculinity mandates such as rape, violence, and cruelty.

Research in other parts of the world, like the UK and Australia, has given way to more-or-less defined study areas under the "education" and "masculin-

Education Faculty (FES) Iztacala, and Claudia Hernández, Marta Jiménez and Eduardo Guadarrama (2015). In the study by Bertha Tlalolin (2017), these expressions are considered to be part of a wide complex of systemic violence in the public university, which tends to become normalised. In their study of the situation in the Autonomous University of Baja California Sur (UABCS), Alba Gámez and Lorena Pérez (2018) note how separating violence from gender has become increasingly difficult. Their work deals with expressions of violence that go from the symbolic to the variety of "violent masculinities" of frequent occurrence. In 2018, Lucila Parga and Rocío Verdejo addressed the various forms of gender violence in the educational space of the National Pedagogic University (EPN) Ajusco as a complex of expressions.

4 For example, a study on the relationship between violence and alcohol consumption at the Autonomous University of Chapingo (Vázquez/Castro 2009); and another one on the influence of these notions on symbolic forms of violence, such as gossip, in the Autonomous University of Chihuahua (UACh) (Vázquez/Chávez 2007).

ities" headings. At stake there are the problems derived from the notion that male students could see their proficiency affected as a consequence of the instatement of gender policies and the feminisation of institutions. The studies produced render accurate and updated accounts on the on-going forms of inequality, as well as on how several forms of identity and representation linked to power mechanisms impact cultural-difference markers mediated by gender.[5] The absence of references to the violence emanating from masculinity models, practices, and structures on the agenda of these studies suggests that the problems in those latitudes differ from the ones found in Mexico. Their focus is on a conciliatory negotiation between feminist and anti-feminist discourses and the impact the confluence between feminist theory and the study of masculinities has on male students. What we can learn from those experiences is the notion of an education that transcends formal limits and aims at forms of socialization and interaction inside and outside the classroom, such as rituals, transfers, and non-regulated events. This form of education may be about how subjectivities are conformed in a context of multiple interactions and complex formations that are not always recognizable.

Critical masculinities, for their part, seek to relocate a number of terms, objects, and methodologies into a common front defined by a category of gender that transcends mere description and poses many problems. Masculinity is not only part of a representational system, or an example of social organization, or a series of labels, but an entity in a system established by gender whose practices are situated always in a privileged position of power (Hearn/Howson 2019, 19). The aim is to bring masculinity studies into the fields of critical feminism, gender, and sexuality studies (Hearn/Howson 2019, 19), knowing that such studies, as they have evolved hitherto, do not themselves guarantee a truly liberating and transformational effort. Studies on critical masculinity in all their versions tend to concentrate on descriptions, stories, and explanations of forms and expressions in specific social and cultural contexts. Given their critical character, and the fact that all of them make it a point to avoid essentialisms, naturalizations or fixed meanings (Hearn/Howson 2019, 20), such politically diverse studies can be considered ontological and epistemological, a combination of "sex role theory with patriarchy theory" (Hearn/Howson 2019, 54pp.).

Our proposal here is to adopt three theoretical perspectives from the field of masculinity studies whose combination has the potential to effectively put an end to violence in the university environment by way of an educational model. Firstly, the hegemonic masculinity model (the most influential theory); secondly,

5 The most representative work in this area is the book by Chris Haywood and Máirtín Mac an Ghaill (2013).

the theory of manhood acts — which came as a response and critical review of the former, signalling a clear return to the feminism path — and thirdly, male peer support theory, derived mostly from the reflection on the sexual violence perpetrated in universities and colleges in the United States in the 1990s. Central to male peer support theory is the idea that violent mechanisms operate as forms of association between male peers.

What follows is a critical revision of the most salient aspects of these theoretical perspectives, with the intention of using them to design a three-pronged educational model on masculinities that looks at ideals, strategies, and alliances, while keeping in mind the violence continuum in universities. These three aspects refer to masculinity's models, practices, and associations, whose operational quality is linked to the sexist structures prevalent today and harboured mostly in the sexual harassment, identified by and emphasised in feminist research. The proposal consists of rethinking the critical character of masculinity studies as a complex while taking a stand against the recurrent idea that forms of violence — especially those considered as "non-gender" — take place in the individual sphere and are of a private and intimate character. We strive to propitiate a structural spin and rethink those masculinity practices that operate from the micro to the macro, aiming at the male subject and his peers and their efforts to support and reproduce the prevalent gender order.

To this must be added, at a second moment, a review of the proposal of "multiple masculinities"; of the recent readings that question the dichotomy toxicity/positivity and assess their impact on the academic and social spheres as well as in some of the subjective positions adopted by male students. Among these readings, the option of "hybrid masculinities" stands out as a theoretical proposition that revisits the problem of violence in its several forms. The analysis closes with an outline of the three-pronged model from the point of view of naming and self-reflection, two strategies that lead to four possible areas of education on masculinities, especially in the context of sexist microphysics and the on-going problems and debates in the University.

The hegemonic masculinity model

The notion of hegemonic masculinity arose as a critique of the imposition of a single masculine role. It maintains that multiple masculinities intervene in power relations in the social, cultural, and political spheres (Connell/Messerschmidt 2005, 830). Although the notion can be traced back to Gramsci's idea of hegemony (Connell/Messerschmidt 2005), it had already been outlined in Australia at the beginning of the 1980s in the context of medium-high education. Questions

arose at that time about the various forms of violence in inter-student interactions and their relation to male hierarchies. It was found that beyond the well-known social class and ethnic group markers, certain forms of violence operated under a different logic — namely, that of gender and its various expressions (Kessler et al. 1985). From its inception, the notion of hegemonic masculinity has targeted the socially most "accepted" and culturally stereotypical version of masculinity, whose far-reaching and more relevant role would be the legitimization of patriarchy through the subordination of women (Connell 2009, 8pp.).

This model starts by questioning men's motives to hold positions of power and control, and rule over their generic opposite as well as other identities, practices, and signifiers regarded as feminine or not masculine enough — even though such identities may change through history and vary from culture to culture. This model is openly critical, for it directly targets power systems and the mechanisms by which power is exercised in violent ways.

The notion of hegemonic masculinity has gone a long way and has become common currency, being sometimes paired with traditional, dominant, and (more recently) "toxic" masculinity. But to understand hegemony, hierarchy is fundamental, and masculinity (in some of its forms) is the standard to which a group that holds or claims power must conform (Connell 2009, 12). In the original proposal, "multiple masculinities" are thought to operate through agreements and disputes that result in the preservation of certain forms of order, and not only as more-or-less acceptable labels or sets of norms. This is not to say that such constructions are devoid of subjective practices or recognizable identities, including the negative effects such disputes may have on the individuals concerned and their idea of what means to be a man (Connell/Messerschmidt 2005, 831).

We think that the "multiple masculinities" perspective can lead to the renewal of ideals of masculinity; that by focusing on specific figures — a football player, a singer, a politician — it is possible to change what being "a real man" has meant historically and culturally (Connell/Messerschmidt 2005, 841). Today, from hegemonic masculinity derive positive, healthy, alternative, diverse, and other emerging forms of masculinity, adding to the already known forms, such as gay, black, mestizo, working-class, white, etcetera. All these forms refer to a model, to a set of ideals with their own meanings, stereotypes, and even archetypes, and they all include rights and obligations that are still perceived as "natural" by those who were born as male. This has an influence on "male" sociability practices — such as readiness for competition — and on physicality — with recognizable guidelines such as muscle mass and sports resistance — but also on a number of "values" that would seem disparaging, or even positive, as are the

renewed versions of virility, chivalry, superiority, fortitude, mettle or competitiveness (Gil Calvo 2009, 6).

Hegemonic masculinity plays a role in maintaining sexist structures in the university environment, for example through practices of exclusion, where males strive for positions of recognition according to sports or academic ideals. In prestigious spaces, gender roles and stereotypes are reinforced by injunctions such as “all great philosophers, pedagogues and thinkers have been men” (Workshop).[6] Similarly, gender rules are established in careers and disciplines, and even in the perception of professions, as indicated by platitudes such as “women who study pedagogy are of the WGM (waiting-to-get-married) type” (Workshop) or “men have a better grasp of the theory” (Workshop). These examples of verbal sexism take hegemony for granted. Luis Bonino conceives of it as a “generating matrix, a living mould […] a normative system, sometimes obligatory”, which “discerns and outlines certain aspects of human capacity” — usually the most valued and highly appreciated ones — to attribute them to men (Bonino 2002, 10pp.). The question is whether in this process a formal complex can be discerned which acts as a masculinity instructor and reinforces and supports specific forms of violence and sexism.[7]

Manhood acts theory and masculinity strategies

Centring on specific acts that are triggered by masculinity and understood as a matrix of recognizable practices, Michael Schwalbe and Douglas Schrock (2009) proposed the manhood acts theory at the end of the 21th century’s first decade. In this construction, the suffix “hood” denotes somebody’s condition or “nature”, but also this somebody’s belonging to a group with a common characteristic, in this case, manliness, virility, masculinity proper.

This perspective arises as a direct critic to the notion of hegemonic masculinity and its “multiple masculinities” (Schwalbe/Schrock 2009, 281). For these authors, this notion ends up turning the gender complex into a “game” of sorts,

6 The reference is to the annual analysis carried out at the Educational Orientation Workshop II of the Pedagogy College of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, UNAM, 2021-II. Under the notion “sexist microphysics”, female students classify recent forms of verbal violence in formal and informal everyday interactions.

7 In the education research field, hegemonic masculinity has been approached, for example, in its organisational capacity to influence the curricular design by imposing certain aspects, such as the heterosexual matrix — the only possible measure of experience — the sexual division of tasks, or a corporal disciplining of a masculine character (Scharagrodsky/Narodowski 2005). Moreover, it is worth noting that the denunciation of the construction of masculinities involves not only the identification of the negative forms that are reproduced at the core of the educational system but, more than anything, the way in which institutions support and regularise them (Herraiz 2008).

a competition in which men strive to position themselves in better or worse versions, depending on the way they inscribe themselves into the dominance model. Such departure from masculinity studies would have distanced these authors from the main principle and objective of the different forms of feminism, namely to demolish patriarchal order (Schwalbe/Schrock 2009, 279). From Schwalbe and Schrock's proposal, the most important thing is not to forget that, beyond the values promoted in a given social context, of the ideals and promises obtained by specific males throughout their education, or the meanings to which they can adhere to subsist in their own social or cultural milieu, masculinity always means "oppression" (Schwalbe/Schrock 2009, 281). With this, the better versions of masculinity that are talked about today conceal the undeniable truth that gender, in all orders of life, operates towards the maintenance of hierarchies and inequality processes. Schwalbe, indeed, speaks conclusively about a higher goal given that, for him, the worst of human history is related to gender, and its eradication would be the only solution to put an end to the widespread suffering (Schwalbe 2014, 12).[8]

In more immediate terms, putting manhood acts on the table implies an exercise of constant "sociological self-reflection" and criticism, for these acts signal the way in which masculinity actors lend meaning to their membership in the "male" category and claim their privileges (Schwalbe in Morris/Ratajczak 2019, 1991). With this, we can understand that the authors refer and look at what men do in everyday life in order to present themselves as such and reproduce the existing inequality, consciously or unconsciously, explicitly or imperceptibly. Manhood acts are practices undertaken as strategies directed to present a "believable" masculine essence to the world (Schwalbe/Schrock 2009, 279). This reading is based on the dramaturgical perspective of authors like Erving Goffman (1987): to be credited as a man, an individual must go through a sort of "acting" and undertake convincing acts (Schwalbe/Schrock 2009, 279) that operate on the line of at least three objectives: men-women differentiation, the constant manifestation of a palpable capacity to secure control, and the demonstration of an unyielding resistance to be controlled (Schwalbe/Schrock 2009, 281). Thus, masculinity must be reinforced on a daily basis by countless actions and strategies.

In education, such strategies are perceived with clarity, for it is there where they are instructed and negotiated. In a continuous line that extends from the nursery to the university level, males learn that "to be a male child" (i.e., a man)

8 Without gender and its masculine expression, crimes such as the Holocaust would have never happened; therefore, dispensing with what we know socio-culturally as 'man' appears as the only solution to the known forms of violence (Schwalbe 2014, 13).

means to be superior to women and femininity. They learn to categorize themselves and others while embodying maleness through a number of actions (Schwalbe/Schrock 2009, 281). Likewise, they discover that masculinity situates them in a position of physical and intellectual control and even that showing some resistance to the educational norms and regulations confirms their masculine identity (Schwalbe/Schrock 2009, 281). Such acts, it must be added, work under the approval, guidance, and advice of other men. In general terms, they are about interiorizing and dominating male identity codes that symbolically constitute the gender order; an order instructed from childhood through the interaction and exposure to the imaginaries in the media but, above all, through reiteration at the micro-political level (Schwalbe/Schrock 2009, 281) of the verbal and sexist violence used by instructors as educational performance. The misogynous example in class — "so that female students can understand" (Workshop) — operates at this level of acting, but even more so the sexual joke that degrades women. This discursive device of constant recurrence is a manhood act that not only constructs the "masculine" image of the teacher who uses it but also establishes a sexual and hierarchical order inside the classroom.[9] As an expression of harassment, the joke creates a "cold classroom" (Mingo/Moreno 2017, 574) marked by an environment of hostility and sexual danger for women students. Finally, the inculcation of masculinities in the classroom takes place through a wide range of lessons that go from the acting and teaching of everyday harassment resources to the establishment of hierarchies in which the male teacher situates himself as "head" given his dominance of the code and his position of command.

Based on a script that puts together a variety of acts, the teachings and lessons on masculinity include other aspects, such as learning to regulate emotions: if a man cries, he situates himself in an inferior rank of the scale, whereas the denial of fear or pain is a demonstration of power that situates him in a high rank (Curry/Messner in Schwalbe/Schrock 2009, 282). Moreover, males learn that they must feel a constant sexual desire for girls; a behaviour that is perfected during adolescence (Schwalbe/Schrock 2009, 282) and manifests itself violently in the relations forged at the university, as a feminist research project on molestation and harassment in HEI shows. All this is directly related to the various

9 In 2020, as classes were delivered online as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, two cases were brought to light by the activism of female students, the most notorious one being that of a teacher in the Faculty of Chemistry who was known by his long trajectory of sexist and verbal violence. This teacher used to talk in class of two types of women (whom he referred to as "girls"): the "gold kiln" who had earned that title by being "the one who has the most boyfriends and is the most ardent of all", and "the girl who would loosen up by a few blows, like an ice bag". He would then go on asking male students what they did to loosen up ice cubes in a bag (meaning their female classmates) (UnoTv 2020).

forms of violence inherent in demonstrations of maleness, among which are, at the initial levels, verbal violence and physical attitudes. Such demonstrations contribute to the signification of heterosexuality in educational relations as a sort of investiture that demands sexist, lascivious comments, and even jokes about harassment and rape (Renold/Messner in Schwalbe/Schrock 2009, 282), as in the case cited in footnote 8.

The theory of male peer support and the alliances of masculinity

Situating ourselves specifically on the role played by the group in masculinity, we now meet with the theoretical perspective of male peer support, which came about in view of the rise of several forms of sexual violence in US senior-high and university campuses in the 1990s and the turn of the century. The proposal by Walter DeKeseredy (1990) aims to take masculinity studies to answer the question of what it is that makes a man to become an abuser both in interpersonal relations and public spaces, including classrooms, university campuses and, in general, the places that surround the student experience.

As a starting point, DeKeseredy takes on the "classical" intervening factors in sexual violence expressions: variables such as social and psychological stress at work and in academia, socio-economic status and class issues, and gender roles in the socialisation of the individual in the classroom (DeKeseredy 1990, 129–130). In hierarchical environments such as education, these aspects are manifest in, for example, the individual's ability to adapt to systems regulated by gender norms. The novelty of this perspective resides in its underlining of the role of peers as a determining factor (DeKeseredy 1990, 130). Consequently, the study identifies the resources generally provided by peers in the form of attachment and fraternity, for example, and the various functions they perform in terms of stimuli, normalising and legitimising the psychological, symbolic, physical or sexual abuse of women or other sexual and gender identities.

According to these studies, such associations provide social integration, support information, and affective support among male peers (DeKeseredy 1990, 130). The general proposal can be summarised in the idea that forming part of a group or network of friends — as a privileged and strategic form of social integration in which sexist and violent practices are part of the environment — can lead a male to become an abuser at different levels, from everyday interactions to sexual relations. This is so because membership in the group or network implies actions that go from a sexist joke to the demand of abuse as a form of social control. This includes imaginaries of violent sexualities and everyday control stra-

tegies such as commanding silence by a simple gesture, hurting the self-esteem of others by giving examples, deriding expressions of affection, etcetera. To this effect, the studies presented by DeKeseredy show that having abusive friends in the university influences the self-configuration of the abuser, and that an abuser is "forged" as a man in a wide range of practices that are not always physical (DeKeseredy 1990, 130). Specifically, these male associations offer symbolic and practical forms of support such as guides, advice, tactics, and the justification of violent attitudes and actions. Also, forms of pressure can be applied so that every group member shows an ironclad masculinity, whose energy resides in the exercise of an early, dominant, and violent sexuality. This conforms a structure of "masculine subcultures" (Leslie in DeKeseredy 1990, 130), which can be farther or closer to the explicit sexual violence, but which always produce modes of domination and oppression based on the submittal or degradation of women and of "men of questioned virility". To be an aggressor — even "potentially" so or at an apparently low level, as the one that comes from sexist humour — lends legitimacy and respect to a male individual (DeKeseredy 1990, 130pp.).

In the field of gender relations in the university context, if we look at the role of harassment as an expression of verbal violence whose aim is to keep a "cold" environment, the perspective of support among peers produces an "adjustment vocabulary" that not only legalises actions but also protects the self-esteem of the abuser (Kanin in DeKeseredy 1990, 130pp.) and promotes the approval of friends (DeKeseredy 1990, 132). In relations among peers, sexist puns and jokes — but also the range of stereotypes that define from a gender perspective the roles in the education environment — not only situate males and construct them as such, but also protect, impel, and animate them, above all when the line that separates the verbal from the physical in the violence continuum is crossed. In the vertical relations of the male brotherhood, this support vocabulary is exhibited, taught, and learned as much in the classroom — as when the teacher asks the male students "how they do it" — as in informal relations.[10] The theory of peer support points to, among other things, the ways in which the classification of women students as "loose" or "easy" and the singling out of those who present a "low self-esteem" operates (Kanin in DeKeseredy 1990, 130pp.). In our investigations at the UNAM, we found that female pedagogy students are usually classified as "easy prey" (Workshop) to male engineering students. In this line, the complicity of laughter or silence before an explicitly sexist and violent joke is a semiotic resource that legitimises an imposed order. Finally, DeKese-

10 Male groupings centred on power, the exercise of violence, and the use of sexual potency as a way of domination have been denounced by Rita Segato (2018) using the notion of *fratria* (brotherhood).

redy points to the fact already mentioned by critical masculinities that rape and femicide, the most terrible forms of violence, benefit all men and not only “bad men” (DeKeseredy 1990, 136).

The dichotomy between “toxicity” and “positivity”: the option of hybrid masculinities

In opposition to “toxic masculinity” and other like forms of masculinity that have been integrated into the meanings of the public domain, other studies on gender violence have launched the notion of “healthy” (or “positive”) masculinity, creating a clear dichotomy with varying success. As Andrea Wailing (2019) explains, this variant of masculinity is having repercussions in the academic and social-intervention spheres. It postulates that men must be capable of rejecting, in a relational and conscious way, the masculine regimes of oppression and support the dismantling of unequal gender relations; that is to say, men must “take up responsibility” for their own masculinity (Seidler in Wailing 2019, 367) and assume their participation in the “power gift” that it entails, which implies avoiding its toxic nature (Wailing 2019, 367). In general, this construction invites men to deal with their own emotions, instead of cultivating stoicism, as well as explore and promote positive, affective, and spiritual forms, personally and in their sexual relations with women and other men (Nagayama Hall in Wailing 2019, 367). This is about practising a positive masculinity that leads men to become a better version of themselves (Wailing 2019, 367).

Still, despite their success in educational policies, social campaigns, psychological-practice workshops or social media, the dichotomy toxic masculinity versus positive masculinity is read unfavourably in feminist circles for, it is argued, it reaffirms gender inequalities instead of solving them. First, because to oppose “healthy” to “toxic” poses masculinity as an illness that, like a plague, affects the bodies/subjectivities of healthy men, instead of recognising that it is something they themselves decide to actively embrace (Wailing 2019, 368). When thinking of themselves as “victims” of such a process, men become prey to an inevitable illness afflicting their category (Wailing 2019, 368). Moreover, the idea of a “cure” is not convincing, as neither is the fact that men cannot opt for the practice of non-violent expressions and relations. This point of view reifies masculinity as “the cause”, instead of denouncing it as a direct and fundamental product of social relations. Instead of being treated as a relational construction, masculinity is thought of as something that pre-exists social relations (Wailing 2019, 368). This is where we propose to think of a triad composed by: 1) ideals that constantly substitute themselves (football players, influencers, *reggaetón* singers,

cultural preachers), 2) everyday and normalised acts that instate themselves as subjectivity practices at a sexist-microphysics level, and 3) strategies of alliance, confraternity and support among peers.

These definitions of masculinity have been questioned from several feminist quarters: what are the characteristics, qualities or behaviours that exactly define positive and toxic masculinity? The general perception is that more evidence is needed to demonstrate that men would be ready to envisage masculinity forms that are not related to dominance or harm (Wailing 2019, 368). To think of masculinity as a sort of social illness afflicting men and from which some of them manage to escape, allows the latter to wash their hands about the structural problem of violence against women, for the blame is put on a vague and inapprehensible entity: toxic masculinity (Wailing 2019, 369).

In the higher education environment, this dichotomy poses a few debates and questions. On the identity and subjective-positioning planes, we may ask to what extent it renews or disrupts the polarisations that have been building up ever since feminism in its various forms made its way into academia and at the onset of masculinity studies — namely, “men for equality” and “pro-feminists” groups versus “men’s rights” and “counter-feminists” groups. A deeper analysis is needed of the ideals, acts, and forms of male association found in campaigns and educational models, as well as in social circles and socio-digital activism. Attempting a brief review, we can point to: 1) the general characteristics attributed to toxic masculinity, such as sexism and verbal violence in interpersonal relations, 2) inequality in professional and domestic roles and activities as well as in care or parenthood, and 3) homophobia as a marker for men to situate themselves within the gender complex.[11]

Today, the sexist structures still in force are once again being targeted by the feminist activism of young women. Two labels are used to that effect: the “progressive *macho*”, which includes “men who think of themselves as progressive because they have a pro-women discourse but who, in everyday life, do not change their male-chauvinistic attitudes”; and the *onvre,* a term used in social media to refer to that kind of “masculine heterosexual man who follows the patterns established by patriarchy and believes he knows what a woman needs and must think or do. Some men who belong in this category denounce feminism because they believe women are more privileged than they are” (Redacción Malvestida 2018, paragraph 36).

11 To this must be added other aspects such as the fact that men are educated to not seek help, get involved in risky practices that affect their physical or mental health, turn frustration into anger, use their sexuality as a form of power, etc. All authors agree that violence against women is a constant, as is the formation of cultures of abuse in hierarchical environments, such as education (Wailing 2019, 367).

Emerging from socio-digital action, these categories enter a dialogue with less-dichotomic academic ones such as “hybrid masculinity”, which, as a starting point, asks how contemporary men deal with privilege — a question that requires a sharper lens to see things.[12] For example, how economic power and social origin, or how race and ethnic affiliation (manhood acts, in Schwalbe’s terms) are used as strategies to marginalise other men and women (Morris/Ratajczak 2019, 1994).

A key and salient point is violence against women. Proponents of hybridity insist on the fact that centring the attention on “bad men” does nothing but reaffirm the dominance exercised by high-status individuals — i.e., the “good” and “protective” men (Morris/Ratajczak 2019, 1994) — and that only the unprivileged ever get punished for violence against women (Meda Chesney-Lind 2002). Looking at violence from the perspective of hybrid masculinity reinforces the notion of the continuum, with its micro and macro implications. The idea is that hybrid males are neither too weak nor too rough (Morris/Ratajczak 2019, 1995), they contemplate that which lies at the margins or within the elite and take a little from here and there to justify their positioning within the model; using the violence of others, they manage to situate themselves in a position of “moral superiority” (Morris/Ratajczak 2019, 1994) — that is, beyond the discredited ideals.

In short, this position cannot be taken as “positive” but rather as a combination of: a) recycled ideals with a promising outlook; b) hybrid practices (manhood acts that are “toxic” or “healthy”, depending on the context and the need); and c) novel forms of association, such as digital violence. This can be proved by the analysis of sexist microphysics in the university context, that is, the statements and actions at the micro end of the continuum that involve a form of violence — be it verbal or physical —and operate under the mark of sexism. Such forms come as much from individuals as from associations.

For example, at the individual level, in the recycling of theoretical figures of “great men” from the academic, professional or sports spheres, or the fact that, despite the enormous presence of women in all spheres and their success, the most prestigious university positions continue to be occupied by men. At the associational level, in the visible occurrence of current practices such as interrupting women — “what our [female] classmate wanted to say” (Workshop) —; the perception by males that, due to their “feminine nature”, women should not be given academic responsibilities — “they are tidier and cleaner” (Workshop) —; the insistence by men on controlling student groups, forums, and meetings

12 The tern “hybrid masculinity” was coined by Bridges and Pascoe (2014).

(Workshop); or the simple, quotidian and constant appropriation of ideas from women classmates (Workshop).[13]

At the last end of the three-pronged model we find the recent associations of male peers that signal an organised rejection of the activism and the protests of feminist women students (Workshop); the organised — and institutional — denial of violent and sexist structures in formal and informal relations; the replication of commonplace expressions such as "it's not such a big deal!", "not all of us are assailants", "men also suffer from violence", "more men than women are killed" (Workshop); the generalised use of notions such as "*feminazis*" — "this is uncalled for" (Workshop) —; and the reinforcement of pacts and camaraderie among men groupings, mostly in digital form,[14] where verbal sexual violence is a sign of belonging.

Conclusion: The three-pronged model and violence in the University

In order to address the central problem of violence, an education based on the three-pronged model of masculinity — which combines denunciation and harassment, the two axes of the violence continuum, and the proposal of critical masculinities — must work on naming and self-reflection. These two lines help situate each male individual within the continuum so that he, in an act of consciousness or sociological self-reflection (Schwalbe 2014) can look critically at his own subjectivity. Self-reflection leads to the identification of the forms of harassment as well as the acts, the resources, and the materials promoted by the masculinity brotherhood (*fratria*), including the dividends obtained by every male individual under the current gender order. Self-reflection can be both personal and political. Personal, because it addresses the conditions of existence and subjectivity — a set of rules (hegemony), a series of performances (manhood acts), a commitment to oneself which presents itself as a possibility of occupying a better place within the clan (the associations) — and political,

13 The interruption with the phrase "what our [female] classmate wanted to say" is a mixture of "mansplaining" and "manterrupting". The first one occurs when a man explains something to a woman in a paternalistic or condescending tone, and the second one when a man feels capable of interrupting the discourse of a woman presuming that he will say it clearer. In both cases, the man thinks he knows better and possesses more authority. The appropriation of women's ideas is called "bropriating". It refers to the practice by men in formal or informal spaces of presenting such ideas as their own and making them seem original and prominent.

14 For example, the new digital subcultures, such as that of "incels" (involuntarily celibates), organised groups of male users of digital social media who come together by a feeling of being marginalised on two fronts: first, by model men, socially and aesthetically adapted to the new orders, and second, by "liberated" women who —they claim — deprive them of access to their bodies because they consider them second-class men.

because to name everyday practices is a way to put in motion the principles of transformation; for example, the dismantling of dichotomic scenarios of good and bad individuals, hybrid forms by which subjectivities are negotiated in a constant, contextual, and situated manner.

Specifically, the three-pronged educational model on masculinities proposes four formal and informal educational arenas. The first one is about examining all the ways in which gender is learned; for example, the ideals of masculinity and hegemony that imply, among other things, systematic harassment practices which, inasmuch as they are manhood acts, work from a sexist microphysics stand. The task here is to generate mechanisms to situate each one of these practices on the violence continuum — as has been indicated — and with this to understand the way in which "being a man" and other generalisations relate to identity (the "I"). This must be done while acknowledging that the anchoring on masculinity implies the embodiment of forms of violence, willingly or not. A good starting point to propitiate self-assessment in the prevailing relations in the university context is the work by Bonino (2014) on microforms of male chauvinism (*micromachismos*), the expressions of which have led to their naming ("bropriating", "gaslighting", "manterrupting", "mansplaining") using an international jargon.[15]

The second arena is the naming of such acts, that is, the denunciation of sexist jokes and other practices as well as their role in generating hostile environments. This action presupposes the explicit recognition of the privileges inherent in the prevailing gender order through ideals and manhood acts. It is about generating change by looking at "the weapons, tricks, stratagems, and traps most frequently used by males to exert their 'authority' over women" (Bonino 2014, 1). The current forms of sexist microphysics are not only opprobrious acts, intolerable during a "bad time for men", but fundamental expressions that feed the essence of a regime so that it manages to keep its violence structures intact. It is about identifying the manhood acts that serve as indicators of force, sexual potency, homophobia, sexism, control and, among other things, the constant differentiation between men and women.

The third arena is the invitation to acknowledge and dismantle male alliances and to emphasise the practices that make them possible, including silence pacts or "hand-washing" in regard to forms of symbolic and physical abuse or violence. Indicators of such practices are the preference to work with "equals" (Workshop), the resistance to collaborate with female colleagues or bosses, the

15 The aim of "gaslighting" is to corner a person to the point of questioning their own ideas, acts or memories, even their own sanity. Women often suffer this form of abuse not only in their romantic relationships but also in their professional life.

existence of clubs and closed groups, and even of male cultures where references to "sexual violence" are often a prerequisite for membership (Workshop). This is what happens in socio-digital groups in which the self-esteem of peers is renewed, above all with the certainty that feminism is taking away opportunities from them in their university experience and that women are winning the battle of sexes or denying these men the right of access to their bodies.[16]

The last arena is the building of empathy and community through the understanding of the problems originated by masculinity under the wing of sexist violence. This is, without doubt, the most complex and less explored of all. It is about avoiding exclusion practices using masculinity as an excuse; rejecting the non-politicised use of masculinity labels; reflecting constantly on what "healthy", "positive", "toxic" and other constructions say about the current structure of sexism and violence and the ideals or values they promise; acknowledging and joining the agency of women, who are not only the victims of "gender violence" but are, in fact, the agents of change; incorporating feminine forms of study, politics, management, organisation, and community in the affairs of male men and of institutions; working against organised cultures, such as those of rape, whose presence in the digital university is becoming viral; reckoning that it is not enough to configure oneself as an inclusive, sensitive, equitable, and profeminist male individual, but that it is necessary to work against the problem of violence in an organised way.

The work that must be done in the University concerns male practice. Only when males name, study, and investigate the various forms of violence and the role of their masculinity in the gender order, will it be possible to begin a dialogue between equals with women. This will render the rules and limits of masculinity ever more volatile and destructible. Thus, it is necessary to insist in opening more spaces for reflection and exchange in which males interact not only with masculinity studies, but also with feminist theories. Failure to do so is tantamount to being contented with one half of the picture. It is necessary to observe and learn from activism and the innovative forms of protest and denunciation proposed by the various feminisms. More males must carry out research with a critical gender perspective and a larger number of courses, theses and programmes must incorporate this point of view. Among the things that must be undertaken and created are: mixed collectives and community and management

16 In the higher education context, debates on these issues are being identified. At the forefront is the analysis of narratives that would be denouncing a "feminisation" of education presenting women as the unequivocal winners of such "battle". These positions add to the idea of a "masculinity crisis", whose most notable evidence would be the exchange of positions between man and women, and that men are lagging behind in access to university or in their performance, mostly due to the unequal support granted to women. A "re-masculinization" of educational institutions is even requested (Haywood/Mac an Ghail 2013, 1).

actions, self-consciousness groups with diverse males, spaces for masculinity dissidence, community radio stations, and podcast and performance workshops.

Finally, as Wailing maintains, masculinities must be far more radical in their approach (Wailing 2019, 370). In brief, an education in masculinities at the university level must focus on the various forms of violence.

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