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RESEARCH PAPERS

TOXIC MASCULINITY AS SELF-DIRECTED AGGRESSION IN MEN

MASCULINIDADE TÓXICA COMO UMA AUTOAGRESSÃO AO PRÓPRIO HOMEM

LA MASCULINIDAD TÓXICA COMO FORMA DE AUTOAGRESIÓN EN LOS HOMBRES

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Abstract: This study investigated the phenomenon of toxic masculinity, aiming to understand its psychological and social impacts on people's lives, particularly on men themselves. Understood as a set of repressive norms that shape masculine ways of being, thinking, and acting from childhood onward, toxic masculinity contributes to men's self-directed aggression and harms their interpersonal relationships. Through a theoretical framework combined with field research, this exploratory-descriptive study, based on a quali-quantitative approach, is composed of theoretical findings on the harms of the hegemonic patriarchal model and examines discursive and behavioral patterns of 100 men through a digital questionnaire. The results indicated diverse perceptions among participants regarding the topic and their personal experiences, as well as showing that all of them are influenced by gender narratives to some degree, even if more or less aware of the issue. It is attested that toxic masculinity not only upholds structures of violence but also compromises men's mental health, reinforcing the need for more authentic and healthier ways of experiencing masculinity.

Keywords: Toxic masculinity; Man; Mental health; Self-aggression; Violence.

Resumo: No presente estudo investigou-se o fenômeno da masculinidade tóxica, buscando compreender os seus impactos psíquicos e sociais na vida das pessoas, em especial na dos próprios homens. Entendida como um conjunto de normas repressivas que moldam a maneira de ser, pensar e agir destinado aos indivíduos masculinos desde a infância, a masculinidade tóxica contribui para a autoagressão dos homens, prejudicando suas relações interpessoais. Por intermédio de uma fundamentação teórica articulada a uma pesquisa de campo, este trabalho exploratório-descritivo de abordagem quali-quantitativa é composto por discussões acerca dos prejuízos do modelo hegemônico patriarcal, sendo averiguados recortes discursivos e comportamentais de 100 homens, por meio de um formulário digital. Os resultados indicaram diferentes percepções dos participantes sobre a temática e suas experiências pessoais, além de que todos são atravessados pelas narrativas de gênero em algum nível, mesmo que mais ou menos conscientes da problemática. Atesta-se que a masculinidade tóxica não apenas sustenta estruturas de violência, mas também compromete a saúde mental dos homens, reforçando a necessidade de práticas mais autênticas e saudáveis de vivência da masculinidade.

Palavras-chave: Masculinidade Tóxica; Homem; Saúde Mental; Autoagressão; Violência.

Resumen: El presente estudio investigó el fenómeno de la masculinidad tóxica, con el objetivo de comprender sus impactos psíquicos y sociales en la vida de las personas, especialmente en la de los propios hombres. Entendida como un conjunto de normas represivas que moldean las formas de ser, pensar y actuar de los individuos masculinos desde la infancia, la masculinidad tóxica contribuye a la autoagresión de los hombres y perjudica sus relaciones interpersonales. Mediante una fundamentación teórica articulada con una investigación de campo, este estudio exploratorio-descriptivo, con un enfoque cuali-cuantitativo, se compone de hallazgos teóricos sobre los perjuicios del modelo patriarcal hegemónico, y analiza recortes discursivos y comportamentales de 100 hombres a través de un formulario digital. Los resultados indicaron diferentes percepciones de los participantes sobre la temática y sus experiencias personales, además de mostrar que todos están atravesados por narrativas de género en algún nivel, incluso cuando son más o menos conscientes de la problemática. Se constata que la masculinidad tóxica no solo sostiene estructuras de violencia, sino que también compromete la salud

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mental de los hombres, reforzando la necesidad de prácticas más auténticas y saludables de vivencia de la masculinidad.

Palabras clave: Masculinidad tóxica; Hombre; Salud mental; Autoagresión; Violencia.

Introcution

Gender norms play a fundamental role in the construction of masculine identities and influence how men perceive themselves, express emotions, and establish social relationships. Although masculinity is not a homogeneous experience, this study focuses on analyzing the effects arising from the internalization of patriarchal gender norms associated with toxic masculinity.

In this regard, toxic masculinity is characterized by discourses and behaviors that value invulnerability, emotional repression, aggressiveness, and emotional detachment, producing effects that extend beyond interpersonal relationships and affect men themselves. By reinforcing normative gender standards, this model may contribute to psychological distress and self-directed aggression.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze toxic masculinity as a form of self-directed aggression among men in contemporary society, considering its impacts on intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions, as well as its manifestations in discourse and behavior.

Gender, normativity, and the production of subjectivities

According to Judith Butler (2018), "gender is not to culture as sex is to nature", emphasizing that both sex and gender are constituted by discursive and normative practices operating within a sociohistorical and cultural context. This dynamic is also explored in the works *Coisa de Menina?* (2019) and *Coisa de Menino?* (2025), by psychoanalysts Contardo Calligaris and Maria Homem, who analyze how gender issues are shaped by imposed social constructions, particularly stereotypes associated with bodies designated as male or female.

It is therefore evident that human beings are subject to the language and labels assigned to them by the culture in which they are situated even before birth or, indeed, conception. In this process, there is a tendency to establish binary symbolic distinctions based on how the body is socially perceived, especially in relation to genitalia. This process of sexuation anticipates and inscribes a signifier onto the subject, as reflected in the name chosen by the parents, the color used to paint the baby's room, the toys provided, and the expectations surrounding the child's future behavior, thereby influencing the formation of subjectivity (Calligaris; Homem, 2025; Nolasco, 1993).

It becomes apparent that the socialization of men and women differs according to the social roles prescribed and legitimized by a norm. Discourses commonly position men in the public sphere and associate them with domination and power, while relegating women to the private sphere of the home and to conditions of subordination (Calligaris; Homem, 2019, 2025). Through the thought of Michel Foucault, this scenario can be understood in terms of subtle and diffuse micro-mechanisms through which power circulates and becomes embedded in interpersonal relationships (Foucault, 1985).

Consistent with this logic, researcher Sedgwick (1985) argues that the marked inequality in access to power between genders may also entail significant differences in the form and structure of human sexuality (Sedgwick, 1985). Accordingly, the heteronormative matrix has come to be understood as guiding and regulating expectations concerning expressive attributes associated with "male" and "female," as well as the acceptable ways of experiencing desire, whose direction has never needed to be explained but has always been presumed (Butler, 2018).

In addressing male domination and female subjugation in *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir puts forward her celebrated proposition: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," which would later become a major touchstone of modern feminism (Beauvoir, 1967). In other words, "becoming a woman" involves acquiescing to an external norm of male supremacy that dictates the rules, whereas "becoming a man" is shaped by an internal demand imposed by those who hold power, that is, men themselves (Trevisan, 2021). Thus, according to Brinkmann (2005, *apud* Zanello, 2018), becoming a subject first involves a process of subjectivation inscribed by a social code that establishes how people should be and exist in the world.

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The construct of gender is therefore extremely complex because it is inseparable from culturally rooted normative models that inspire and shape subjective experience. These subjectivities are, in turn, reproduced, taught, and reflected in socialization, historically differentiating what men and women must be in order to be recognized as such.

Male socialization and the internalization of gender norms

In this context, boys' upbringing and education, shaped by patriarchal values and beliefs, are understood to foster rigid masculine identities characterized by restricted emotional expression and the valorization of aggressive behavior and invulnerability. Over the course of life, these characteristics may manifest as toxic masculinities, whose effects do not affect others alone but also fall upon men themselves (Paula; Rocha, 2019).

It is therefore not uncommon for boys to learn and carry with them the burden of what is expected of them, hearing and reproducing statements such as those recorded in the documentary *The Mask You Live In* (2015). These include: "We don't talk about feelings in my house", "Sometimes I can't be myself", "Men use violence to solve problems", "Showing emotion is showing weakness", "A man has to be dominant and have control over everything" and "It's okay to be a womanizer."

The 2019 documentary *O Silêncio dos Homens*, produced by PapodeHomem/Instituto PdH and Zooma Inc., identified the extent to which men agreed that, during childhood and adolescence, they had been raised according to beliefs that did little to encourage authenticity. Among these beliefs, 85% were taught that they should be professionally successful; 78% were taught not to behave in ways that might seem feminine; 73% were taught to be physically strong; 67% were taught to be financially responsible for supporting the family; 60% were taught not to express their emotions; and 48% were taught to flirt on women whenever possible.

In connection with the legitimacy of this phallocentric patriarchal law, Ropa (1994, p. 175–176, *apud* Silva, 2006, p. 128) argues that "we turn our sexual and gender identities into a destiny, into something that imprisons us, a destiny for 'us' and a hell for others, for those who dared to question the limits of the prison". Breaking with this prescribed destiny would therefore mean subverting and questioning the social place assigned to being a man.

Nevertheless, even when raised in loving and progressive households that place a central emphasis on welcoming and expressing emotions, boys may still choose patriarchal masculinity in order to gain acceptance from their peers or male authority figures and conform to the prevailing norm (Hooks, 2021). Along these lines, researcher Valeska Zanello (2018) argues that social technologies such as the media, cinema, magazines, toys, and insults serve as resources for social representation that incorporate and shape gender roles through a powerful affective pedagogy, which colonizes emotions through preexisting discourses.

Data from Arpen-Brasil (National Association of Registrars of Natural Persons) show that, of the 2.5 million births registered in Brazil in 2023, approximately 172,200 occurred without paternal acknowledgment. This represented an increase of about 5% compared with 2022, when 162,800 cases were recorded (Lisboa, 2024). In this regard, responsibility for raising and caring for children appears to be delegated almost exclusively to women, who are symbolically linked to the maternal role, which is symbiotic in nature in relation to their offspring. By contrast, fatherhood assumes a more emotionally distant role, particularly in relationships with sons, in order to preserve an authoritarian image that masks weaknesses and vulnerabilities inherited from previous paternal figures (Trevisan, 2021).

Once the relationship between fathers and children has been established, psychoanalyst Paulo Roberto Ceccarelli argues that identification with the father figure serves as a foundation for understanding masculinity (Ceccarelli, 1997). However, the absence of this symbolic bond appears to be a generational pattern, as illustrated by the previously mentioned study *O Silêncio dos Homens* (2019). Most of the men surveyed identified their fathers as their primary models of masculinity, but only 1 in 10 had ever spoken with their fathers about what it means to "be a man"; and only 3 in 10 men reported that they regularly share fears and doubts with friends.

As Elisabeth Badinter (1993) states, a son has an intimate need to be recognized and affirmed by his father, but this need conflicts with the rule of silence. This logic reinforces an obsessive form of self-assertion grounded in the imperative to be a real man and in emotional silencing (Trevisan, 2021).

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The image of what constitutes a "real man" and self-assertive behavior converge and reinforce one another, shaping restrictive identities while leaving the harmful consequences of this way of existing in the world insufficiently understood by those who enact it. This point is illustrated by the following passage:

> A problem arises when aggressiveness becomes the unquestioned driver of emotions. This is somehow what happens when the human male treats aggressive impulses as an essential quality of his virility, that is, as a symptom that helps define the difficult-to-grasp concept of 'being virile'. In a favorable cultural context, the practice of unrestrained virility can easily slide into the normalization of violence (Trevisan, 2021, p. 17).

From the same perspective, Ropa (1994, p. 173, *apud* Silva, 2006, p. 129) emphasizes that "[...] We demand that 'others', those who do not 'fit' or fall within our narrow definitions, prove our 'truth' or 'superiority' by being degraded, humiliated, or pathologized".

In the same perspective, Judith Butler's (2018) critical questions guide an understanding of how the core of oppression sustains patriarchal hegemony and the heterosexual matrix. This can be seen in alarming rates of violence against people who are more vulnerable or who deviate from the norm, including women, black people and individuals with non-normative sexual orientations or gender identities, such as gay and transgender people.

Virility and violence as device of male self-assertion

The 2019 National Health Survey (PNS) found that current or former partners, boyfriends or ex-boyfriends, and relatives were the main perpetrators of physical (52.4%), psychological (32.0%), and sexual (53.3%) violence against women, and that this violence occurred most frequently in the domestic setting (Nery, 2021).

Another significant finding concerns the homocide of women, which supports femicide analyses. The Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea) and the Brazilian Forum on Public Safety (FBSP) documented that more than 47,000 women were murdered in Brazil between 2013 and 2023. In 2023 alone, 3,903 women were victims of homicide; 35% of these cases occurred in the home, and 68.2% of the victims were black women. These number that indicates the intersection between sexism and structural racism (Atlas da Violência, 2025).

When men feel threatened, whether by women who end relationships in pursuit of autonomy or other partners, or by women who challenge the prescribed "place of a woman", they often react fiercely against socially vulnerable targets. This aggressive response may be individual, but it can also take a collective form through men's group behavior, in which virility is reaffirmed and validated by other men within a sexist and misogynistic framework (Calligaris; Homem, 2025; Trevisan, 2021).

The high number of assaults and killings of women in Brazil shows that, in this context, the role of the perpetrator, who is predominantly male, cannot be understood solely as an individual expression of violence. Rather, it is a manifestation of a cultural pattern that naturalizes male power over women's bodies and lives. The magnitude of this violence blurs the boundary between the concepts of homicide of women and femicide, since, in a society shaped by misogynistic practices and a symbolic order that legitimizes male domination, a woman's death can rarely be separated from gender-related motives. Thus, every act of lethal violence against a woman reveals, to a greater or lesser degree, the reproduction of a patriarchal order that sustains inequality and reaffirms men's central position as agents of coercion within the heteronormative matrix.

With regard to violence against LGBTQIAPN+ people, data from Atlas da Violência (2025) indicate that, from 2022 to 2023, the health system recorded a 35% increase in attacks against gay and bisexual people and a 43% increase in attacks against transgender people and travestis. The latter group accounted for the largest number of recorded victims of homophobic and transphobic attacks in the country.

Compulsory heterosexuality thus establishes a repressive law governing desires and performances that deviate from its matrix, distinguishing what can be said from what cannot, and what is legitimate from what is illegitimate (Butler, 2018). The phallocentric system is defended through constant surveillance not only of other's desires but also of one's own repressed and forbidden desires, which threaten the narcissistic wound in masculine identity and thereby generate a self-destructive vicious cycle (Calligaris; Homem, 2025; Trevisan, 2021).

Self-directed aggression and psychological distress in contemporary masculinity

Given the vicious cycle in which men, women and a society structured around the patriarchal model are entangled, it is important to emphasize that men's mental health is also compromised. According to the study *O Silêncio dos Homens* (2019), 6 in 10 men report dealing with emotional disturbances to some degree, many of which remain undiagnosed because they avoid seeking help. The most common include anxiety, depression, pornography addiction, and insomnia. Other addictions, including alcohol, drugs, food, gambling, and video games are also present in men's lives.

It is worth noting that hegemonic masculinity creates conditions in which these behaviors can occur while imposing on men an identity configuration based on virility, heterosexuality, emotional detachment, aggressiveness, and risk-taking, evoking historical figures such as knights, soldiers, and warriors. In contrast, newer models of masculinity have emphasized the need to redefine men's social roles, as fathers, husbands, lovers, workers, and citizens, for the benefit of the social well-being of everyone involved (Silva, 2006).

Against this complex set of phenomena, the toxicity of hegemonic masculinity must be exposed: it has persisted throughout millennia of human history without adequate reflection on its social construction and, above all, on men's psychological distress in response to phallocentric patriarchal supremacy. In addition to the brief review of the literature presented above, this study seeks to capture perceptions, beliefs, and experiences associated with normative models of masculinity through an exploratory investigation with adult men. The aim is to foster critical analyses of traditional gender models and encourage healthier, more conscious ways of experiencing masculinity, contributing to the deconstruction of stereotypes that sustain structural and unspoken forms of violence enacted by men themselves, in other words, self-directed aggression.

Methodology

This study is an exploratory-descriptive investigation using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. It is grounded in empirical field research and combined with a theoretical framework based on the available literature on masculinity, mental health, and gender relations (Gil, 2002).

The field research involved administering a structured questionnaire through Google Forms from August to December 2024 to 100 adults who identify as male, following approval by the Research Ethics Committee of Centro Universitário de Itajubá – FEPI (Approval No. 6.942.284/2024). Convenience sampling was used: the questionnaire was disseminated nationwide through social media and successive sharing among contacts until 100 responses had been recorded, resulting in a non-probability sampling process.

After providing consent to participate, respondents were invited to watch the music video *Masculinidade* by Brazilian artist Tiago Iorc, released in 2021 and embedded in the questionnaire through a YouTube link. This artistic resource was used to prompt reflection on the topic under investigation. The artist's autobiographical content was intended to encourage participant engagement before they completed the questionnaire.

Participants answered 12 questions: 2 collected identifying information, and 10 consisted of multiple-choice items; additional open-ended questions addressed personal opinions and self-assessments related to masculinity. For the analysis, responses to multiple-choice questions were examined using percentage analysis, while open-ended responses were analyzed using the categorical content analysis technique proposed by Laurence Bardin (2016).

Results

Among the 100 adult men who participated in the study, young adults predominated: participants aged 18–37 accounted for 79% of the total sample, while the remaining 21% were aged 38–58 or older. With regard to sexual orientation, heterosexual men represented the largest group, accounting for 56% of the sample, compared with 44% who identified as non-heterosexual, including gay and bisexual men, as shown in the table below.

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Tabela 1 - Distribution of participants by age group and sexual orientation (%)

Age group	Heterossexual	Non-heterossexual	Total
18-27 years	29%	14%	43%
28-37 years	16%	20%	36%
38-47 years	8%	9%	17%
48-57 years	2%	0%	2%
58+ years	1%	1%	2%
Total	**56%**	**44%**	**100%**

Source: Prepared by the author.

- **Quantitative Analysis**

After watching Tiago Iorc's music video, 63% of participants reported partial identification with its themes of gender stereotypes and traditional masculinity, while 26% reported complete identification. Only 11% did not identify with the themes or were unable to express an opinion. Regarding the video's impact on reflection, 48% indicated that they had developed a more critical perception of masculinity, 12% reported questioning previously established conceptions, and 40% stated that the effect on their perceptions was minimal or nonexistent.

The data show that 59% of participants believe masculinity may be shaped and defined by both genetic and biological components and social, historical, and cultural components. In addition, 34% believe that masculinity derives from a defined and reproduced social construction, whereas only 2% consider biology to be the defining factor. Another 5% reported having no formed opinion on these perspectives.

The study indicates that 31% of men frequently experience feelings of inadequacy or insufficiency because they do not meet gender expectations, 39% experience these feelings in specific situations, and 11% experience them rarely. By contrast, only 10% reported never experiencing such feelings. Among gay and bisexual participants, these experiences occurred predominantly either frequently or in specific situations.

Regarding men's mental health, 66% believe that the repression of emotions, feelings, and behaviors can constitute a form of self-directed aggression produced and reproduced by men against themselves. Meanwhile, 30% consider this complex to depend more on each man's individual experiences and on the ways they find to cope with social expectations of masculinity. A smaller proportion, only 4%, believe that men can express themselves authentically regardless of these imposed expectations.

- **Qualitative Analysis**

For the qualitative component of the study, categories were developed through content analysis of participants' responses to the questions. A careful effort was made to classify the accounts within each category; nevertheless, some quotations could reasonably fit into more than one category. Priority was given to contextual interpretation of the emerging content.

Tabel 2 - Open-ended question and responses concerning feelings of inadequacy/insufficiency

Question 1: If you experience or have experienced feelings of inadequacy or insufficiency because you do not fit socially defined standards of what it means to be a man, how would you cope, or how have you coped, with these feelings?		
No.	Categories	Quotations/Accounts:
38	Coping strategies and reframing	"[...] I become more self-aware [...] and respect my individuality.";
		"[...] I attend psychotherapy to learn how to cope better";
		"[...] I try to focus on what is healthy for me";
		"[...] I distanced myself from people and institutions that uphold these standards [...] I encourage other men to talk about their feelings".
9	Breaking with social norms	"[...] by following my own philosophy of who I am and what being a real man means to me";
		"[...] it does not interfere with my routine, so I do not care.";
		"[...] disentangle the social conception from my reality.".
14	Defensive withdrawal and disengagement	"[...] I just ignored it.";
		"[...] I turn to the virtual world to escape.";
		"pretending not to care";
		"Absolute silence".
13	Psychological and behavioral consequences	"[...] Frustration, low self-esteem";
		"[...] shame, fear, a sense of not belonging and exclusion."; "introspection [...] social phobias.";
		"[...] a more withdrawn stance when expressing negative feelings";
		"additional pressure [...] to 'make up for' not being heterosexual.".
11	Conformity, internalization, and social reproduction	"[...] I learned to bully others so my classmates would not call me a faggot.";
		"[...] keep things to myself and handle them rationally rather than emotionally.";
		"[...] Create different personas, concealing our true selves.";
		"[...] we have to adapt to our surroundings to be accepted."
15	Did not directly answer the question posed.	

Source: Prepared by the author.

Responses to the first open-ended question led to the development of five categories covering participants' actual or hypothetical experiences of feelings of inadequacy or insufficiency arising from not meeting social standards of masculinity. Most responses fell into **"Coping strategies and reframing"**, which encompassed ways of dealing with the situation through reframing and personal reconstruction based on self-knowle-

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dge, self-analysis, increased awareness, and social support. A smaller number described breaking with, rejecting, or disregarding social norms and others' opinions, emphasizing authenticity and personal identity, as reflected in the category **"Breaking with social norms"**.

Three additional categories emerged, with similar frequencies, that differed in content but were in direct contrast to the two categories described above in terms of the direction of participants' accounts. These were **"Defensive withdrawal and disengagement"**, **"Psychological and behavioral consequences"** and **"Conformity, internalization and social reproduction"**.

The first category reflected a more passive, self-defensive or self-protective response involving withdrawal from or noninvolvement in such situations, whether due to fear, insecurity, or a lack of coping resources. The second encompassed the negative emotional and behavioral effects experienced by these men, while the third captured responses that conformed to social expectations, adapting to these standards and attempting to reproduce them by policing others.

It is important to note that 15 of the 100 participants did not answer the question as posed. Of these, 7 stated that they had not experienced feelings of inadequacy or insufficiency; however, their responses were classified as nonresponses because they disregarded the hypothetical nature of the situation presented. Nevertheless, the quantitative component of the study found that 10% of the total sample had never experienced these feelings.

Table 3 - Open-ended question and responses concerning the harms of the imposed model

Question 2: In your view, how can masculinity, as a socially imposed model, become harmful and negatively affect people, especially men?		
No.	**Categories**	**Quotations/Accounts:**
45	Social and relational dimension	"[...] perpetuating sexism against women, structural violence, and class inequality";
		"[...] anger is the only acceptable emotion under this model.";
		"[...] This emotional illiteracy harms everyone, without exception.";
		"[...] an intrinsic desire to maintain privileges.";
		"[...] viewing ideals, objects, and people as possessions.";
		"[...] heteroromantic expectations".
26	Dimension of subjectivity	"[...] represents a denial of the self";
		"[...] subjects him to cruel standards and mutilates the possibilities for existence.";
		"[...] a social image or persona is 'created'";
		"[...] they believe that being different is 'strange'".
13	Dimension of psychological distress	"[...] increased loneliness, depression and anxiety";
		"[...] psychosomatic illnesses";
		"[...] leaving the individual exhausted";
		"Suicide rates demonstrate the cruelty of this imposed masculinity.".
10	Dimension of divergent perceptions	"[...] depends on individual experiences";
		"I do not know whether it is that harmful, I believe it is necessary.";
		"[...] if it were not for this, this mindset, I would not be where I am.";

		"[...] shaped generations of men who, despite the difficulties, learned to deal with challenges and shoulder responsibilities.".
6	Did not directly answer the question posed.	

Source: Prepared by the author.

Responses to the second open-ended question made it possible to develop four categories to understand how participants identify and explain the harms caused by the imposition of masculinity on society and, especially, on men themselves.

Most responses were classified under **"Social and relational dimension"**, indicating that the harms are linked to the maintenance of a patriarchal, sexist, and heteronormative model that imposes standards such as aggressiveness and emotional detachment on men, resulting in difficulties in interpersonal relationships. From another perspective, some men described how this imposition restricts the space available for diverse, individual, and authentic expressions of masculinity in society; these responses were grouped under **"Dimension of subjectivity"**. Consequently, participants also identified conditions of psychological distress and even suicide among men as effects of this social model, which were grouped under **"Dimension of psychological distress"**.

Fewer responses were discordant with this view and were grouped under **"Dimension of divergent perceptions"**. In this category, participants qualified or even disagreed with the claim that the established model harms men, in some cases recognizing its functional and historical aspects. In addition, 6 participants did not answer the question.

Discussion of the Results

Each participant appears to experience masculine gender identity in a distinct way, shaped by factors such as age, race, sexual orientation, and social status. Accordingly, the accounts reveal differences in how participants understand what it means to be a man and whether, in their view, expressions of masculinity are toxic.

It is important to note that each participant's particular understanding of masculinity shaped all subsequent perceptions expressed in their responses on the topic. Although there was a consensus that masculinity is defined by both biological factors and social constructions, the latter were understood to manifest through the historical and cultural reproduction of ways of being, acting, thinking, and feeling among males. Thus, the social code can be understood as the lens through which the biological code is interpreted, assigning specific functions and responsibilities to men. Moreover, a reductionist interpretation of biology is often invoked to legitimize the patriarchal social code.

The prescription of a hegemonic gender model simultaneously invalidates other possible forms of expression and personal identity formation, with psychological and social consequences for men and women. As Michel Foucault (1985) notes, social relations are constituted through micro-mechanisms of power that act upon bodies within this patriarchal system (Trevisan, 2021). However, although they were a minority, some participants did not recognize the harmful effects of perpetuating this model. Among those who did recognize them, some nevertheless chose to reproduce it, motivated by the associated privileges or by the pursuit of social acceptance.

Tiago Iorc's music video *Masculinidade* serves to encourage men to reflect on the topic through their individual experiences. However, given the diversity of responses, and thus of experiences, in terms of identification with the work, two interpretations can be proposed. First, the video may have functioned more as confirmation of preexisting ideas aligned with the study's objectives than as a stimulus for significant perceptual change: 89% of the sample identified to some degree with the narrative presented by the artist, but only 12% believed they had developed a more critical view of masculinity.

More broadly, the findings suggest that most men may not yet have developed a conscious awareness of the need to problematize these issues across different layers of social life. This is illustrated by one participant's statement that men could change the toxic situation by "stopping blaming others, as Tiago himself does

in the video clip". This reflects a line of thought that rejects the intergenerational systemic influence shaping hierarchical and gendered experiences of men and women in society.

It is also important to consider that participants' sexual orientation indicated different ways of experiencing masculinity and its toxicity. As suggested by Butler (2018) and Trevisan (2021), the heterosexual matrix guides human desire and sexuality, making men who do not conform to this pattern more susceptible to external pressures that, when internalized, can lead to feelings of social inadequacy and insufficiency.

The accounts analyzed point to this process, albeit with varying intensity, indicating that this form of male socialization may also undermine emotional well-being. In this regard, a substantial proportion of participants (38%) reported that, in adulthood, they needed to develop coping strategies in response to these feelings arising from gender norms.

Within the landscape of gender ideologies, especially those imposed on men by heterosexist patriarchal norms, it is relevant to consider how these standards may foster a form of self-directed aggression, as men repress emotions, feelings and behaviors deemed "unmasculine", at the same time, this mechanism may be projected onto relationships with others. Although such repression is widely reinforced by the norm, its intensity may vary according to individual experiences.

The harms associated with gender imperatives are not limited to the individual sphere; they also extend to society more broadly, as can be seen, among other indicators, in high rates of violence. In this context, such manifestations can be understood both as expressions of virility ideals and as mechanisms for maintaining them. This process leaves its mark on the expression of masculine subjectivity: emotions and affect tend to become hardened, shaping relational experiences that are often perceived as more distant or superficial.

Thus, hegemonic masculinity both organizes power relations and produces paradoxical effects, operating as a mechanism that also acts upon men themselves and compromises how they feel, relate to others, and care for themselves.

Final Considerations

This study investigated toxic masculinity through theories and accounts that support the understanding that all individuals undergo processes of subjectivation and sexualization, linked to an affective pedagogy and situated within a binary, hierarchical framework whose elements interact. The study also showed that this framework has negative psychological and social effects, with consequences that extend throughout individuals' lives and across human history.

The findings underscore the urgent need for further research and for intervention proposals addressing the crisis of masculinity. This toxic core significantly affects how men relate to themselves, to one another, to women, and to their children. Men's mental health and psychological well-being should therefore not be viewed solely as individual concerns, but as collective issues that permeate contemporary social life.

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