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Representation of the masculinity of academic men and its implications for the health field

ABSTRACT | Objective: to know the representation of masculinity of academic men at Universidade Federal Fluminense and analyze its implications for the health field. Method: this is a descriptive, exploratory, qualitative study that used the hermeneutic-dialectic methodological framework. Submitted to the Ethics Committee of Hospital Universitário Antônio Pedro under CAAE 0264.0.258.000-10. The participants were fifteen male academics, from different undergraduate courses in university. The socio-demographic data questionnaire and a semi-structured interview instrument were used. Results: the testimonies showed the importance of knowing the representation that each individual has about his masculinity, in order to better understand the man and his expectations. Conclusion: the reduced involvement of academics in health care is due to the masculinity models established throughout the life of men.

Keywords: Masculinity; Gender; Men's health; Care.

RESUMEN | Objetivo: conocer la representación de la masculinidad de los académicos en la Universidade Federal Fluminense y analizar sus implicaciones para el campo de la salud. Método: se trata de un estudio descriptivo, exploratorio y cualitativo que utilizó el marco metodológico hermenéutico-dialéctico. Fue presentado al Comité de Ética del Hospital Universitario Antonio Pedro bajo CAAE 0264.0.258.000-10. Los participantes de la investigación fueron quince académicos masculinos, de diferentes cursos de pregrado en la universidad. Se utilizó el cuestionario de datos sociodemográficos y un instrumento de entrevista semiestructurada. Resultados: los testimonios mostraron la importancia de conocer la representación que cada individuo tiene sobre su masculinidad, para comprender mejor al hombre y sus expectativas. Conclusión: la menor participación de los académicos en la atención médica se debe a los modelos de masculinidad establecidos a lo largo de la vida de los hombres.

Palabras claves: Masculinidad; Género; Salud masculina; Cuidado.

RESUMO | Objetivo: conhecer a representação da masculinidade dos homens acadêmicos da Universidade Federal Fluminense e analisar suas implicações para o campo da saúde. Método: trata-se de um estudo descritivo, exploratório, de natureza qualitativa que teve como referencial metodológico a hermenêutica-dialética. Foi submetido ao Comitê de Ética do Hospital Universitário Antônio Pedro sob o CAAE 0264.0.258.000-10. Os participantes da pesquisa foram quinze acadêmicos do gênero masculino, de diferentes cursos de graduação da universidade. Utilizou-se o questionário de dados sociodemográficos e um instrumento de entrevista semiestructurada. Resultados: os depoimentos mostraram a importância de conhecer a representação que cada indivíduo possui acerca de sua masculinidade, para que melhor se compreenda o homem e suas expectativas. Conclusão: o reduzido envolvimento dos acadêmicos com os cuidados em saúde decorre em função dos modelos de masculinidade estabelecidos ao longo da vida do homem.

Palavras-chaves: Masculinidade; Gênero; Saúde do homem; Cuidado.

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INTRODUCTION

Studies on masculinities and men have gained relevance in gender approaches in the last two decades in the country, in which the relationship between man and health is the object of attention in academic circles and also in the context of health services, especially in the analysis of human sexuality and reproductive health. ⁽¹⁾

Gender research in health is a complex and relational field with great possibilities for development. Complex, as it encompasses themes (health, illness and care) that can be addressed both within the fields of health and the human and social sciences, independently, and from a perspective of approximation and collaboration between them. ⁽²⁾

Throughout history, masculinity presents itself in different ways within the social and cultural context. Having man as a “social being”, it cannot be denied that despite this “freedom” there are still certain social standards to be adopted. Social pressure involves everything from relationships with close people, such as family and friends, to less intimate relationships. The social “script” developed for men exerts pressure, even if, unconscious about thoughts and attitudes where masculinity is almost always linked to this figuration. ⁽³⁻⁴⁾

In the field of public health, the concern with the theme of male health is still recent and incipient, but in constant production. Several studies point to the implications of the meanings attributed to “being a man” in the health, well-being and quality of life of the Brazilian male population. ⁽⁵⁾ Despite recent government initiatives, men are still distant from health services and care practices, especially those aimed at health promotion and disease prevention, thus resulting in higher rates of illness, hospitalizations and death among this population. ⁽⁶⁻⁷⁾

One of the difficulties in treating men's health is the gender issue, rooted in society, about male invulnerability. According to the Ministry of Health ⁽⁷⁾, men find it difficult to recognize their needs, cultivating magical thinking that rejects the possibility of falling ill.

In addition, the men's illness process is linked to representation about masculinity that compromises access to primary care, as well as having a critical impact on the vulnerability of this population group. ⁽⁷⁾

For the development of this study, the objective was to know the representation of masculinity of academic men at Universidade Federal Fluminense. We sought to analyze the implications of the representation of masculinity for the health field.



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METHOD

This is a descriptive, exploratory study of a qualitative nature. The qualitative approach, in social sciences, can be anchored in different theoretical and methodological references. The hermeneutic-dialectic perspective was chosen.

The hermeneutic approach, from a methodological point of view, develops in the following parameters: seeks differences and similarities between the context of the authors and the context of the researcher; explores the actor's situation definitions, assumes sharing between the observed world and the subjects, with the investigator's life world; seeks to understand the facts, reports and observations and supports this reflection on the historical context; judge and make decisions about what you hear, observe and share; and produces an account of the facts in which the different actors feel contemplated.

The dialectical approach seeks in the facts, in the language, in the symbols and in the culture, the obscure and contradictory nuclei to carry out a criticism about them. Dialectical thinking needs to create instruments for criticizing and apprehending the contradictions of language, understanding that the analysis of meanings must be placed on the ground of social practices, valuing the processes in the dynamics of contradictions, within which the very opposition between the evaluator and evaluated place themselves, and to emphasize the historical conditioning of the speeches, relations and actions. ⁽⁸⁾

For data collection, in the first moment, a questionnaire with fourteen questions was used, categorized in closed questions that refer to the production of objective sociodemographic data that characterize the academic men participating in the study. In the second moment of data collection, a semi-structured interview was conducted, with open and subjective questions.

The research participants were fif-

teen academic men from different undergraduate courses at the Universidade Federal Fluminense, of different age groups, ethnicities and social classes, but all male.

The first contact with the participants occurred after establishing a relationship of trust, respect and security with these academics, where each one was invited, through an invitation letter to participate in the research. The correspondence contained a brief description of the objectives and proposal of the study, questions regarding the identification of researchers and their availability to participate in the research. In order to comply with ethical issues in research, the study was submitted to the Ethics Committee of Hospital Universitário Antônio Pedro under CAAE 0264.0.258.000-10.

From the collected data, categories were formulated in which elements, ideas, expressions and words that are repeated or repeated are grouped, to establish classifications. The categorization of data means pointing to categories in which the expressions emitted on a theme fit. The subject, therefore, is organized according to the words that are usually frequent and that can provide consensual explanation.⁽⁹⁾

RESULTS

The interviewees were chosen in order to seek a great diversity of the Undergraduate Courses at UFF, respecting their willingness to participate in the study and to facilitate the understanding of the reader, sociodemographic data were collected that refer to age, marital status, undergraduate course, religion, housing, lifestyle and health care for male academics.

The academic men of the Universidade Federal Fluminense are in the age group of 18 to 23 years old, representing 27% (4) and all declared themselves to be single. In this way, they are in the youth phase and according to D'Andrea⁽¹⁰⁾, experiencing youth is a difficult si-

tuation, because at this stage of life, the individual separates emotionally from his parents and develops a personal and sexual identity.

In the analysis of the distribution of the undergraduate courses to which the fifteen academic men from the Federal Fluminense University belong, 20% (3) were in the library science course; 13% (2) were in the course of letters, cultural production, economics and journalism. A total of 7% (1) were in the social service, medicine and nursing course. In this study, we sought to interview a wide variety of higher education courses, in order to obtain a greater heterogeneity of ideas and central opinions about the representation of masculinity and its implications for the health field.

Regarding the color/race item, it was noticed that 67% (10) declared to be white; 13% (2) brown and 7% (1) black and mulatto or ignore. Many young people did not know in which classification to fit, however, there was a prevalence in the color "white", although many mark this option using the justification that in Brazil there are no whites.

In terms of religion, 33% (5) said they believe in God, but they have no religion; 20% (3) said they were Protestant or did not believe in God and 7% (1) said they were spiritualists or non-practicing Catholics. Each religion has its differences in some aspects, however, the vast majority are similar to believing in something or someone from the higher plane and in the afterlife.

As for the frequency in which academic men from Universidade Federal Fluminense seek health care, 53% (8) stated that they seek health care only when they feel some type of pain; 20% (3) look periodically and 7% (1) look whenever possible. Luck⁽¹¹⁾ and Courtenay⁽¹²⁾ in their studies they found that men, in general, suffer from severe and chronic health conditions than women and also, they die more than them due to the main causes of death.

Regarding the last time the inter-

viewees received health care, the study found that 53% (8) received this care between 1 month and less than 1 year; 20% (3) received in the last thirty days or received between 1 year and less than 2 years and 7% (1) received it five or more years ago. According to the Department of Strategic Actions and Programs of the Ministry of Health, the difference in health care is attributed to cultural factors. Meanwhile, the girl is encouraged to see the gynecologist from the beginning of menstruation and to do preventive exams from the first sexual intercourse, the boy only goes to the doctor when he is ill.⁽⁷⁾

When asked about the places of health care, 46% (7) are seen in a private doctor's office; 27% (4) are seen at a health center or post; 20% (3) in a hospital outpatient clinic and 7% (1) in a pharmacy. Currently, self-medicalization has been strongly discussed in our society, due to the incessant increase in undue drug consumption. According to Slater (13) the culture of consumption, established in the 19th century, is based on the consumption of goods where the market is a mediator in social relations. Thus, this event promotes the diversification of drugs, generating the need to create demand for consumption, which consequently places advertising as a fundamental vehicle for the dissemination of a new meaning of medication.

When examining the speeches of academics and, after reading the interviews, a thematic category was discussed, discussed in the topic below.

DISCUSSION

Being and becoming a man in Brazilian society: reflecting on masculinities

When academics at Universidade Federal Fluminense were asked how they represent masculinity and what attributes define it, they determined that masculinity is a socio-cultural and historical construction, rejecting that biology itself explains the differences between the sexes:

It is a stereotype ... a label of society that changes over time. (Interviewee 1)

Until today, masculinity is a stereotype, because for society man has to be strong, he has to be responsible and he has to impose respect. (Interviewee 2)

Masculinity is present in the way we dress and in the manifestation of our attitudes towards situations and problems that arise in life. (Interviewee 13)

Keijer⁽¹⁴⁾ argues that we can understand the identity marks of masculinity, situated within the scope of gender relations, as a set of attributes, values, functions and behaviors that man is expected to have in a given culture.

In our society there is a role for men and another for women. It was up to the man the space outside the house, to hunt, to build, to produce. As for the woman, the space of the home, of nourishing food and affection, of educating, of taking responsibility for the other. Finally, for a long time, the space of provision was reserved for men and the space for care was reserved for women. Among the attributes that define masculinity, we highlight the speech of two academic men from the Universidade Federal Fluminense who have heterosexuality as the main characteristic of masculinity:

In my opinion, what defines masculinity would be the fact that you are born a man, with the physical understanding of a man and, of course, in my case, remain, thus, heterosexuality. (Interviewee 15)

I think masculinity is a matter of being attracted to a woman. (Interviewee 14)

The speeches of the participants are in line with the production of various researchers who describe masculinities and their different forms. According to



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Welzer-Lang⁽¹⁵⁾ assimilating male sexuality and its share of games, desires and pleasures, the heterosexual paradigm imposed itself as a line of conduct for men.

Thus, in the speeches of these academic men, it refers to what scholars call a hegemonic model of masculinity, where the characteristics described are very marked and present in the lives of the vast majority of men in Brazilian society. Gomes⁽¹⁶⁾ says that the hegemonic masculinity model, heterosexuality and domination stand out as structuring axes.

In another article, the hegemonic model of masculinity is also cited by Garcia⁽¹⁷⁾ who mentions that the hegemonic values of masculinities are described by their attributes, such as: provider, virile, aggressive, conquering man, in need of demonstrating his strength, competitiveness and heterosexuality.

Participant 11, a 28-year-old university graduate in letters, draws attention, mentioning honor as the main attribute of masculinity, as shown in the sentence:

I think that the greatest attribute of masculinity is strength, it is honor (...) I am always trying to be an honorable person, always looking for strength. (Interviewee 11)

Authors explain that the symbolic construction of masculinity is articulated around the challenge of the honor of dispute between men and the control of women. In this sense, it can be seen that, despite being part of a young generation, having a higher and more reflective formation in relation to a large part of the Brazilian population, issues related to masculinity are rooted and are reproduced from generation to generation.

Many people have the preconceived idea that the whole of humanity is heterosexual and that a minority of individuals are "addicted" to homosexual behavior.

To Bortolini⁽¹⁸⁾ when it comes to homosexuality or transsexuality, opinions abound. Some based on concepts, ideas

and beliefs and others are built on top of common sense and even complete ignorance. If we look around us, we will realize that we live in a society with patriarchal values, in which different stereotypes surrounding homosexual men prevail, being sensitive and effeminate people, making out in the bathroom and/or holding onto public places in the middle of the night.

There are spaces and/or situations where masculinities and femininities come into greater evidence. In these spaces, the prevalence may occur even in an unplanned way, but based on a social context of gender differentiation. Considering that gender is a fundamental category in the experience of bodily practices in sport and leisure, and that the gender dimension is also present in the broad scope of human relations in sports and cultural practices. According to the interviewees, some spaces and/or situations can be considered exclusively male characteristics:

Bars and environments related to football and wrestling. (Interviewee 7)

or soccer stadiums and bar. (Interviewee 15)

The existence of spaces where masculinity is more expressive is not uncommon. Such spaces and/or situations are important in order to reaffirm masculinities. According to Paim and Strez⁽¹⁹⁾, at the moment when a person participates in an organized crowd, he is being constituted of situations of expansion of various emotions, often repressed by the social environment of everyday life. In this way, it is in front of the crowd that this person demonstrates his identity and begins to manifest and act in a way that he would not do in isolation, putting out any feeling of helplessness and personal frustration, which were diluted in the collective of the stands.

Therefore, Gomes⁽¹⁶⁾ mentions that this learning usually occurs in monose-



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xual places of homosociability - spaces in which only men participate - by convincing that, to be a man, one must fight what could be associated with women. However, for some respondents, these spaces and/or situations are not exclusively male, as they value gender equity in the most varied public environments.

I believe that it does not have exclusively male environments. I think public environments are for both genders. (Interviewee 12)

It does not have a specific space. I think this question of you delimiting specific spaces is very segregating. (Interviewee 4)

There are also interviewees who directed spaces and/or situations exclusively masculine to the profession, as being more prevalent for men and women, showing a form of self-affirmation of masculinity, and the denial of the feminine. Gomes (2008, p. 73)⁽¹⁶⁾ notes that the perception of the male as opposed to what is seen as female is still very much incorporated into our daily lives. In the interviewees' testimonies this can be noticed.

Parents are the first educators with whom children have contact, there is no denying that countless information and social codes will be transmitted and absorbed by children, even though they may change over the years accompanied by individual experiences. Humphreys⁽²⁰⁾ refers that the family is the first nucleus of socialization of individuals. She is responsible for transmitting the values, uses and customs that will form the personality and emotional baggage of the human being.

Based on these experiences, it is possible to ask the interviewees if the representation of masculinity has changed over time and it can be seen in the following reports, a great highlight in the historical and temporal aspects:



Masculinity has changed over time. According to the influences

that the person has throughout life, with the experiences and the repertoire that the person has throughout life. (Interviewee 9)
Masculinity sometimes changes in the medium to long term. But this happens all the time. (Interviewee 7)

To Gomes (16) there is the conception that men and women are transhistorical, eternal and the unchanging essences have been widely criticized. Still on the evolution of representations of masculinities, Garcia emphasizes (2006, p.37)⁽¹⁷⁾ hegemony is seen as historically changeable.

In the view of some researchers, the different ways of expressing masculinity have undergone changes throughout the history of civilizations. In each historical era, values and expectations of models are built to which the sexes must adjust in order to attain minimal social respectability.

What is understood in the speeches of the academics of the Universidade Federal Fluminense is that the representation of masculinity has undergone changes, even if they are classified only as a form of maturation and this was only done in fact through the experiences acquired in the course of life. Taking into account that masculinities are built in a historical, social and cultural context. In this context, respondents were asked to point out some difficulties and facilities, nowadays, in "being a man" and "being a woman" in our society.

As facilities, the arguments that stood out were the condition of freedom and the employment dispute between the sexes, in which the man would be favored most of the time, as evidenced in the following statements:

Ease of being a man in society...
So, because man has certain freedoms, that is the ease. (Interviewee 4)

Despite the reduction of gender inequality, including the enactment of Federal Law no. 9.799, of May 26th, 1999, which deals singularly with the access of women to the labor market and, from the federal government's own programs, it is a fact that women find it difficult to enter the labor market and, when inserted in this context, receive less than men and occupying hierarchically inferior positions.⁽²¹⁾

The separation of careers reflects, to a large extent, the sexual division of labor itself, translating into "female careers" more linked to social areas, therefore "care" and the "male careers" known as exact sciences, more technical. This separation corresponds to a division in terms of hierarchy and social and wage recognition. While the so-called "female" areas end up constituting the least socially valued careers, those occupied mostly by men are spaces with higher pay and social prestige. The argument of freedom mentioned above can be read as a veiled machismo, where the man is allowed a "transgressive" behavior without major judgments and the women are responsible for keeping ethics, morals and the example to be followed.

Muraro and Boff⁽²²⁾, show that the process of individualization to the dynamic and always difficult integration of men and women [...] A new type of manifestation of women and men is outlined everywhere in terms of partnerships, collaboration and solidarity, in which men and women embrace their differences in the horizon of a profound personal equality, of origin and destiny, of task and commitment in building more benevolence towards life and the Earth and in more participatory and democratic social forms among the genders. As difficulties, we find the weight of responsibilities and stereotypes in the hegemonic masculinity imposed by our society, as shown in the speeches that follow:

Exactly that stereotype. You have to fit it, otherwise you have a pro-

blem. (Interviewee 2)

A difficulty in being in certain sectors, you are required to have a type of posture that you may not want. (Interviewee 6)

Talking about the difficulties of "being a man", a point that calls our attention is related to the fact that men are interested in the field of the arts, as can be seen in the excerpt below:

I think that people who are connected in the arts, always face a difficulty in expressing themselves, they are always rated as effeminate. (Interviewee 14)

In these speeches, it is evident that the taboos, myths and stigmas that involve the culture of a society distort the field of knowledge in which the visual, plastic and scenic arts are inserted. Simioni⁽²³⁾ stresses that art history is taken as a discursive practice pervaded by gender dynamics, a practice that crystallizes in the way its valuing categories are constructed and the hierarchies that define the very objects on which it focuses as a discipline. This pedagogized discourse on art defines female creativity as something to be controlled by recipes and prescriptions of "how to do", escaping any level of excellence, or even any similarity and visibility of the so-called "great art".⁽²⁴⁾

CONCLUSION

Masculinity is established throughout a man's life. Being in society, gender issues involved in the organization of social relations between individuals of the same or opposite sex, maintain the connection with the entire physical, emotional and psychological structure of each man.

The different masculinities take place in a historical construction, in this sense, it evolves and takes different forms and meanings according to his-

torical time, generation, ethnicity and social group.

Today, masculinity takes on a plural form, respecting the differences between men, even if from the same generation, ethnicity or social class. Despite this tendency towards diversification, many still do not see it that way, considering themselves excluded from a hegemonic model, should there be any flight or denial of what is considered "normal" or minimally common.

As this masculinity is shaped according to social conformity, it is necessary to learn what is previously proposed and accepted by society, creating the existence of spaces where the representation of masculinity becomes evident, even if some of these environments are also

frequented by women. This hegemony of a stereotype of masculinity generates insecurity and dissatisfaction in those who try to be the way they have determined for themselves, because the judgment that society imposes is not overlooked.

Having a social conjuncture as a basis in human evolution and in the representation of masculinities, the family appears as the first social network in which this individual is inserted, being able to teach them values. And just point out the most suitable way for the man to better live his masculinity.

It is complex to exercise a masculinity in a society that at the same time demands a lot of responsibilities from a man and offers perks. The middle ground is difficult to be found, although, if

each one lives a different masculinity, it cannot be denied to abstract a society that constantly observes and evaluates its belongings.

Bringing the field of health to light, this man who has his socially constructed masculinity, is assigned many burdens that spend a long free time and his physical vigor. In this way, health-related issues are treated at a lower level, and are mostly remembered only in cases of acute and/or chronic pain.

Creating spaces that have a greater identification with the male audience and also, entering into conventionally male spaces is essential to promote health, which is not only the absence of diseases, but a biopsychosocial and spiritual well-being of the individual. 🐣

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