


UNVEILING MASCULINE SILENCE: REFLECTIONS ON IDENTITY AND CARE <https://doi.org/10.56238/sevened2024.037-164>**Anderson Alexandre Araújo Sá¹.****ABSTRACT**

This article investigates male discourses surrounding the construction of gender identity and care, using as a basis the narratives presented in the documentary "The Silence of Men". The research explores how normative discourses, perpetuated since childhood, contribute to the formation of emotional barriers in men, making it difficult to express feelings and open up to vulnerability. The impacts of hegemonic masculinity and how this structure affects both men and their interpersonal relationships are analyzed, addressing topics such as gender violence, emotional repression, and resistance to care. The study also highlights initiatives to deconstruct hegemonic patterns, emphasizing the importance of reflective practices and the active involvement of men in the ethics of care. The qualitative methodology, based on content analysis, allowed the identification of three thematic categories: discourses on being a man, violence and hegemonic masculinity, and protagonists and practices of care. The results point to the need to rethink masculinities from a critical perspective, promoting care as an essential component for gender equity and emotional well-being.

Keywords: Man. Masculinities. Silence. Gender. Care.

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INTRODUCTION

Since childhood, men are socialized to play social roles that require emotional control and the silencing of their feelings. This socialization occurs through normative discourses frequently reproduced by family members, friends, and teachers, such as: “men don’t cry,” “real men have to be brave,” and “men who are men like women.” Such discourses contribute to the construction of emotional barriers, making it difficult to identify and express feelings, as well as to communicate about the emotional impact of these experiences and their implications for interpersonal relationships. The hegemonic masculinity model, marked by youth, heterosexuality, cisgender, whiteness, strength, and virility (Rodriguez, 2020), is socially normative and considered the most honorable way to be a man (Connell, 2013). This pattern encourages male domination over women and subordinate masculinities, that is, marginalized expressions of masculinity, such as those of non-white, non-heterosexual men or those who deviate from traditional standards of strength and power (Connell, 2013). Hegemonic masculinity, in interaction with patriarchy and machismo, defines which individuals are socially recognized as “legitimate men”. Kimmel (1998) highlights that masculinities are social, dynamic, and contextual constructions, inserted in power relations that reinforce inequalities of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and age, with sexism and homophobia as expressions of this process. According to Castro (2018), the construction of a democratic society requires that education reduce inequalities, dismantling both subordinated feminine identities and toxic masculinities produced by machismo. Although the model of masculinity encourages aggressive, virile behavior and disregard for characteristics associated with femininity, it also affects men themselves, reflected in the high rates of traffic accidents and homicides, while women, disproportionately, face domestic violence and harassment at work.

In addition, it is necessary to question phallocentrism, a belief that permeates men's socialization processes, positioning them as "natural dominators". This perspective disregards other forms of gender expression, rendering invisible masculinities that are not structured based on virility and violence, but that manifest themselves around weaknesses and vulnerabilities (Medrado, 2014).

Bell Hooks (2020) highlights that, at the beginning of the contemporary feminist movement, there was an anti-male policy, in which women's anger was channeled as a form of liberation. This anger arose in response to how men benefited from patriarchy to exercise sexism, even when they participated in struggles for social justice, such as workers' rights, the rights of the poor, and racial equality. However, when the debate



involved gender policies, the hypocrisy and selective bias of these discourses became evident, which ended up reinforcing male domination over women.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that one of the central challenges was to recognize that men were not solely responsible for the problem and that it was necessary to understand the role of women in maintaining and perpetuating sexism. The author emphasizes the importance of male participation in feminism, not only as allies but as active agents in the fight for equality, which can contribute to the redefinition of male identity. This involvement promotes a policy of care that values self-esteem and self-love, both for oneself and in relationships with others, considering that every culture of domination tends to attack these aspects, conditioning the construction of a sense of identity to the subjugation of others (Hooks, 2020).

According to Harding (2019), even though men enjoy privileges due to patriarchy, it is possible to develop and apply reflective actions that consider experiences not based on the depreciation of women and men socially perceived as “feminine”. Another relevant aspect to be highlighted is the self-silencing of groups of men who perform dissident masculinities. From Butler's (2019) perspective, these men do not align with the "heterosexual matrix", as they do not fit into the field of cultural intelligibility that naturalizes certain bodies, genders, and desires. This includes, for example, homosexual and bisexual men, black men, trans men, the poor, and those who present gender expressions considered “effeminate”. Given the above, the Brazilian documentary *The Silence of Men* (2019), directed by Ian Leite and Luiza de Castro and produced by Instituto Papo de Homem, stands out as an important reference in discussions about hegemonic masculinity. The work explores the experiences of men in the process of constructing their identities, addressing themes such as performances of masculinity since childhood, the experiences of black and trans men in the context of masculinities, fatherhood, gender violence, male aggression, and emotional restriction.

According to Guilherme Valadares (2019), editor-in-chief of PapodeHomem, the production of the documentary *The Silence of Men* was motivated by the realization that men rarely share their fears and insecurities, a silence reflected in contexts such as domestic violence, the absence of women in positions of power, harassment and high rates of suicide, homicide, and incarceration.

The documentary highlights how men can engage in a policy of care through reflective groups, discussion groups, and social movements. However, in Brazil, male therapeutic groups based on psychologizing and spiritualist approaches are also emerging (Filho, 2022). Many men still resist the deconstruction of hegemonic masculinity,



perpetuating the cycle of non-care, since care is socially associated with the feminine. This resistance is rooted in a gender structure sustained by heteronormativity, machismo, and patriarchy, which reinforce ideals of strength, virility, and invulnerability (Machin et al., 2011).

Although some activities seek to question the underlying processes and subjection involved in male gender performance, changing attitudes requires reflective practice, as collective lament alone does not transform gender-based power relations. Filho's (2022) study also highlighted the participants' limited knowledge of feminism and their agendas aimed at building a “new man”. Given this, this article analyzed male discourses on masculinities, based on the experiences portrayed in the documentary *The Silence of Men*, investigating: what elements make up the discourses on the construction of male identity. What initiatives have men adopted to deconstruct hegemonic masculinity? And how can they engage in an ethics of care?

METHODOLOGY

This study is characterized as qualitative research, whose data collection was carried out based on the analysis of the discourses presented in the documentary *The Silence of Men* (2019). The accounts present in the documentary were transcribed using the Transcriptor platform and subsequently submitted to a content analysis of a categorical-thematic nature, as proposed by Bardin (2016).

Content analysis, in this context, involved the segmentation of the material into units of meaning, followed by the categorization of excerpts based on conceptual similarities. This approach allowed the identification of discursive patterns and the construction of thematic categories, considering the social representations of masculinity and emotional care.

The analytical process was conducted in three stages: (I) Pre-analysis – organization of the collected material and constitution of the corpus of analysis; (II) Exploration of the material – coding, and categorization of relevant discursive excerpts; and (III) Treatment of results, inference, and interpretation – reflection on the emerging meanings, integrating the categories created into the theoretical discussion on masculinities and care.

Data treatment was aided by NVivo 14 software, a tool that facilitated the coding and organization of data into thematic categories, enabling a more systematic and rigorous analysis. The main categories resulting from this analysis were: (a) discourses on being a man; (b) violence and hegemonic masculinity; and (c) protagonisms and care practices.

This methodological approach allowed us to explore the perceptions and experiences of the participants, contributing to a critical understanding of the processes of



construction of masculinity and the possibilities of deconstructing hegemonic patterns through reflection and care.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative analysis of the discourses presented in the documentary *The Silence of Men* allowed us to identify different aspects related to the experiences and perceptions of masculinity. The participants' statements were grouped into three thematic categories, which emerged from the content analysis: (a) discourses on being a man; (b) violence and hegemonic masculinity; and (c) protagonisms and care practices. Each of these categories will be presented and discussed below, in conjunction with theoretical references on gender, masculinities, and care.

DISCOURSES ON BEING A MAN

This category refers to the discourses that express the participants' perceptions about the meaning of being a man. Participant A describes his experience as a black man and highlights the efforts he made to achieve an ideal of masculinity based on whiteness. He also emphasizes that this parameter proved to be unattainable in his process of identity construction.

So I had a series of theories and beliefs about what I thought a man should be. It is very common for us to hear or feel that we, as black men (in my case, still with light skin), need to be better than others to get somewhere. If you are not ten times better than the white boy in your class, you will not get anywhere near where he is. So, for a long time, I tried to build a vision of what it would be like to be an increasingly better man, to understand that my aspiration at that time was to become a white man, to try to be a man that I would never become (Participant A).

Your speech highlights essential aspects of masculinity and the process of becoming aware. The first point highlighted is that black men are often perceived as the 'other', not being fully recognized by hegemonic masculinity. The second aspect addresses the relationship of inequality marked by ethnic and gender parameters, in which blackness is positioned as undesirable and associated with a place of 'inferiority'. In this context, black men face the need to strive to surpass white men, whose privileges, historically and socially conferred, guarantee greater access and inclusion in various spaces.

Bell Hooks (2022) highlights that black men, in our society, are often stereotyped by sexism and racism, being seen as lacking intellectual abilities. From this perspective, the body is overvalued to the detriment of the mind, since the white supremacist capitalist imperialist patriarchy portrays them as 'not very intelligent', 'idiots', and 'slow'. The black man who reflected excessively was, therefore, perceived as a threat in the context of a



racist society. Given this, the identity construction of black men is permeated by the racism produced by whiteness, so their Ego Ideal is also mediated by this process. Souza (2021, p. 41) states that the black subject 'is born and survives immersed in an ideology imposed on him by the white person as an ideal to be achieved and which endorses the struggle to realize this model'. The author also highlights that in the construction of the White Ego Ideal, the fundamental rule imposed on the black subject is denial, that is, the rejection and attempt to eliminate any 'black stain' in his identity.

Furthermore, it is possible to identify in the speeches of participants B, C, and D the presence of attributes such as virility, competition, effort, and provision, which reinforce the hegemonic place of man. The figure of the provider refers to the man as the main person responsible for the financial support of the family, while the woman is destined to take care of 'household chores' and motherhood. This sexual division of social roles dialogues with the perspective of Zanello (2018), who describes the 'loving and maternal device' as central to female subjectivity. The love device, in particular, acts as a mechanism for disempowering women and empowering men, protecting them psychologically, since, culturally, women are expected to desire to conquer and maintain a loving relationship. If they do not meet these expectations and remain single, women are socially rejected, which can lead to psychological suffering.

To be a man, you have to be virile, you have to be competitive (Participant B).

Men have to be in the fields, they have to take care of the cattle, and they have to go to the plow (Participant C).

Men go out to work and provide for the family, while women stay at home washing dishes, taking care of the children, and cleaning the house (Participant D).

In this context, motherhood, associated with the care women provide for their children and household chores, is a benefit for men, as it reinforces the division that positions women in the private sphere and men in the public sphere. This logic helps to explain why so many women abandon their projects to dedicate themselves to their partners' goals. Men, on the other hand, are challenged by the device of effectiveness, which refers to gender performances linked to sexual and labor virility. Sexual virility is related to the demonstration of potency, the conquest of multiple partners, and the affirmation of attributes such as being 'unbreakable' and 'alpha male'. Labor virility, on the other hand, concerns productive performance, especially in the field of work, requiring being employed, providing financially, competing with other men, and resisting to maintain the social status of dominator (Zanello, 2018).



The following is the participant's speech:

Since childhood, men have to forge a masculine identity that is based on strength, on lack of sensitivity, it is as if the emotional part, the affective part could not come to the surface, right? (Participant E)

Participant E associated the concept of masculinity with notions of strength and lack of sensitivity. His speech highlights how the emotional restriction present in the male identity makes the expression of sensitive and affectionate aspects interpreted as signs of fragility and, therefore, negative. However, when this emotional dimension manifests itself through violence and aggression, as in public physical confrontations between men, the male status is reaffirmed, being perceived as a sign of authority and dignity, especially when associated with strength. These performances of masculinity are also observed since childhood when boys interact with each other in fighting games (Bola, 2020).

Participant E also reports:

And this creates a straitjacket within the male universe, right? As if men often grow up with all their emotions locked away. To me, this explains a lot about why men have to compete all the time or put their lives at risk all the time for honor. Or do you understand? To prove that they are men, to not take offense, right? So, the codes that we are passing on and living in society are extremely threatening to men, because men kill themselves and they kill others.

This positioning leads us to reflect on the possibilities of male subjectivation that are not necessarily legitimized by hegemonic masculinity. However, do men reflect on these issues? Are they concerned about how hegemonic performance can repress and imprison their emotions? From this perspective, 'not thinking' is associated with the field of the unreflective and unshakable, a strategy that seeks to obscure identity fragility and preserve the status quo (Teperman et al., 2020).

Participant E also highlights that men often put themselves in risky situations in an attempt to maintain their honor, aiming to suppress any evidence of emotional vulnerability. The man considered honorable is the one who exercises control and submits to social law, which implies occupying a position of dominance over others (Machado, 2004).

Men engage in violent behavior against themselves and others, which is directly associated with the risky situations in which they are frequently inserted. The Epidemiological Bulletin of the Ministry of Health (2021) revealed a higher risk of death from violent causes among men in the last ten years, while women have a higher prevalence of suicidal ideation and attempted suicide (Borges et al., 2010; Nock et al., 2008). In the case of men, there is a greater lethal intent and a pattern of aggressiveness that manifests itself in the use of more lethal methods, such as firearms and sharp objects, in addition to



influences from economic instability. On the other hand, women tend to use less lethal means, such as self-intoxication and poisoning, which, although serious, are more likely to be reversed when care is provided quickly and effectively (Stone et al., 2016; Fisher et al., 2015).

VIOLENCE AND HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

This category highlights one of the aspects mentioned in the documentary: violence as a consequence of the impact of hegemonic masculinity. Among the main themes addressed by the participants, violence directed at women, black men, and the LGBTQIA+ community stood out.

In one of the reports, participant F pointed out that the lack of emotional openness and the difficulty in recognizing and expressing one's feelings often result in the use of aggression and violence, directed at both other men and women and even one's children.

I think that being able to identify few feelings, not being able to name what one feels is one of the reasons that lead many men to use violence as a language. This language will permeate the relationship with him, but with other men, with women, and with children (Participant F).

Violence manifests itself as a mechanism to guarantee domination in human relationships, making dialogue and the construction of genuine exchanges difficult. In the context of gender relations, this dynamic becomes even more rigid, since the symbolic instrumentalization of subjects generates patterns of thought and behavior that crystallize both genders in fixed and essentialist positions (Arendt, 2008). In addition, the violence resulting from the hegemonic male model is culturally perpetuated and reinforced by persuasion devices and institutional structures (Connell; Messerschmidt, 2013). Violence against women, in this scenario, is used as a way to legitimize male power and virility. However, there are expressions of hegemonic masculinities that are not limited to violence and toxic practices (Santos et al., 2021).

The following statement by Participant G is related to the concept of marginalized masculinity, as described by Connell (1995):

But without a doubt, I think some experiences are more specific, right? As an example, the first police raid, for example, that I took was my birthday, in 2004, I will never forget, a gun to my head, I was leaving a concert, going to the house of a friend who had a birthday on the same day as me. The pain is understanding that I blame a place that regardless of how I am, how much I study, how handsome I am, how well dressed I am, how smelly I am, how cool I am, that comes before me, right? That comes before me (Participant G).



According to the author, marginalized masculinity refers to the relationship between ethnic groups and subordinate social classes, manifesting itself when hegemonic masculinity exercises power over other groups. This marginalization is intrinsically connected to other social markers, such as race and class. In this context, black men become targets of marginalization by the dominant group of white men and by the structure of whiteness, with police approaches being a recurring experience of violence and pain. Regardless of individual achievements, blackness continues to be perceived as a 'stain' on the standards of hegemonic masculinity.

This violence is also expressed symbolically, especially in the construction of the racial identity of the black subject. This dynamic is related to colorism, in which the darker a person's skin, the fewer rights, 'privileges', and social access they have, unlike those who approach the ideals of whiteness (Cruz; Baliscei, 2020). The genocide of the black population is part of this problem, since hegemonic masculinity sustains structures of violence directed at this population, especially against young black men, who are often targets of police stops (Silva, 2020).

In this context, another population that is frequently targeted by violence is the LGBTQIA+ community, since hegemonic expectations of masculinity impose that men must be heterosexual, reinforcing normative standards of behavior and identity. This social pressure, mentioned by Participant H, contributes to marginalization and aggression directed at those who do not conform to these ideals, highlighting how hegemonic masculinity operates in the exclusion and repression of dissident identities.

I think that living in fear is almost a standard for anyone who is part of any minority. Whether it is a woman who does not go out on the street without fear of being harassed, a gay man who is afraid of suffering violence, or a black man who goes out on the street and someone thinks he is a mugger. People do this not because of other trans people, people do this because this norm of being a man, of being a woman is what kills us, right? This anger, this hatred that kills trans people, that violates gays, that violates lesbians, that violates women, is all of this that violates society (Participant H).

Both homophobia, misogyny, and racism represent instrumentalized expressions of violence, resulting from the imposition of compulsory heterosexuality, an ideal that sustains traditional masculinity (Carvalho, 2012). According to Louro (2019), this dynamic becomes even more complex for subjects whose interests or desires diverge from the heterosexual norm, often resulting in silence, dissimulation, or segregation. Since the dominant representation of masculinity is linked to heterosexuality, this norm is often accompanied by rejection and violence against homosexuality, manifesting itself explicitly in homophobia. Homoaffectivity, in this context, is culturally associated with the 'feminine world', being



represented as synonymous with fragility, sentimentality, and permissiveness. Finally, violence directed at women stands out, as reported by participant I:

I think that every woman has a story of violence to tell, every woman has several stories of violence to tell, violence that happened at home, violence that happened in the workplace, and violence that happened online. Almost sixty percent of cases occur when the woman says she wants a divorce or says she wants to break up with her boyfriend or girlfriend, but he doesn't accept it, and unfortunately, his way of reacting to this is with violence (Participant I).

This violence manifests itself in various contexts, whether in the domestic or professional environment and is often expressed through sexual harassment. The control exercised by men also stands out, as mentioned by the participant, especially in contexts of relationship breakdowns, in which aggressive reactions replace dialogue. These dynamics contribute to the high rates of femicide, in which men are the main perpetrators. Although there have been legal advances in tackling gender-based violence, such achievements are still insufficient to transform the daily reality of violence faced by women.

According to Russel (2011), femicide is motivated by gender inequality, resulting from structural inequalities that sustain violent masculinities and make the murders of women socially intelligible. Among the arguments frequently used to justify such crimes are the 'legitimate defense of honor' and 'killing for love' (Pimentel et al., 2006; Eluf, 2021).

In romantic relationships, the structure of violence is legitimized when the woman's separation or attempted breakup becomes inconceivable to the aggressor, leading him to murder as an extreme form of control. From this perspective, jealousy emerges as a reaction elaborated from a sex-gender system based on female morality and monogamy but is interpreted differently when it comes to men (Maffioletti et al., 2022).

PROTAGONISM AND CARE PRACTICES

This category is related to the moments when men highlighted care as a possibility of rethinking masculinity, or when they associated it with the educational process aimed at forming new perspectives on being a man. This approach emphasizes male protagonism in the deconstruction of hegemonic masculinity, highlighting the importance of vulnerability and emotional openness in the development of healthier and more equitable relationships.

The first report to be addressed is that of Participant J, who mentioned emotional openness as a way for men to recognize and express their weaknesses:

Emotional openness has to do with you saying, man, I'm afraid of not being competent at my job. I'm afraid of losing my partner, my father is very sick and I don't know how to react to him, I don't know what to say and I have a lot of things bottled up here that I can't say. This is emotional openness and I don't need to do it by crying or saying that I'm a poor guy (Participant J)



When discussing masculinity, it is interesting to note that male discourses often refer to emotional restraint as a central characteristic. However, in the documentary analyzed, an emphasis on the importance of emotional openness can be seen. Participant J highlighted the value of men revealing their weaknesses, allowing them to be symbolized and thus enabling the construction of other forms of expression of masculinity, far from the hegemonic standard. However, in his speech, a resonance of this hegemonic model can still be observed when he states: 'I don't need to do this by crying'. But what if this man ends up crying?

Reflecting on emotional openness also implies considering it as a central aspect of men's health. The feminist reading of gender and health, since the 1960s, has significantly transformed the field of human and social sciences, as well as natural and health sciences, driven by the protagonism of women's and feminist social movements (Medrado, 2008). However, men tend to avoid contact with their fragilities, since they often associate illness with weakness, which makes it difficult for them to express their anxieties and makes them more resistant to reporting emotional symptoms (Silva; Melo, 2021).

The following is a story from Participant K:

When you choose to talk about what's inside, you won't be less of a man for it. When a friend chooses to do this, your father, your son, your brother, I don't make light of it. Ask him why he's saying this, and what he feels (Participant K).

Participant K also highlights that attitudes focused on caring in relationships between men and with others do not imply a loss of masculinity. However, sensitive and caring behaviors often trigger questions about male identity, making these men targets of 'jokes', teasing, and bullying, especially through pejorative expressions such as 'faggot' and 'woman', which reflect the maintenance of hegemonic stereotypes. Such reactions often come from the dominant social group, aiming to disqualify alternative forms of male expression.

In the study by Oransky and Fisher (2009), when operationalizing the construct of masculinity, it was identified that social provocation — manifested by jokes and jokes between men — seeks to test the capacity to tolerate discomfort as part of the process of male affirmation.

Participant K also emphasizes the importance of questioning the motivations and feelings underlying these provocations, bringing an empathetic dimension essential to the construction of care practices. This approach breaks with individualism, in which men prioritize only their desires and pleasures, and promotes insertion into a relational ethic



focused on care. A transformation in this sense was reported by one of the participants when describing how his attitudes began to change when he became a father:

From what my father raised us, he always said if we didn't do it whatever he told us to do. The beatings rolled. We didn't have the freedom to sit down with him like that. Dad, I want to talk to you. We didn't have that. When he sat down to talk, he already had the board in his hand. He gathered the boys and my brothers so that one would beat the other. Today you're going to cut the board to beat whoever did something wrong. So all of this had a consequence that oppressed me until I heard my wife say, "I'm pregnant." Okay, I'm going to want good things for my son. I'm not going to want what my father did to me. (Participant L).

It is essential to reflect on the extent to which paternal care extends to the exercise of fatherhood, especially considering that, in many contexts, men still delegate the role of caring exclusively to women, a practice often 'naturalized' as belonging to the female gender. However, the concept of active fatherhood, increasingly debated, differentiates the 'father who helps' from the 'father who cares'. The first limits his/her participation to basic care, such as changing diapers or bathing, while the second is fully and affectionately involved in raising the child, seeking to develop emotional bonds and actively participating in family and domestic responsibilities, such as cleaning the house, preparing meals, taking the children to school, scheduling medical appointments and sharing daily tasks. This balanced division aims to reduce the burden and inequalities between family members. In this context, the father becomes the protagonist of care, whether alongside his/her partner or even independently, as occurs in the cases of 'solo fathers' in single-parent families (Moura, 2021).

One of the participants associated care with more active participation in fatherhood, as highlighted in the following report:

Rethinking masculinity starts with rethinking what our care for others is. I gave an example in a group of black fathers a while ago where the guys were talking, and complaining about their partners and then I asked a question there, I asked a question. I said, listen, you know, your daughter is five years old, five years old. Do you know how many pairs of your daughter's panties are in her drawer? Then the guy got worried, but what does that question have to do with it? No, someone has to know. And so when I ask this when I ask these questions, I also ask myself. I also find myself in this position of I don't know how many pairs of panties my daughter has in her drawer. (Participant M).

In this context, participant M brought up a provocative reflection when he questioned paternal involvement, asking if one of the caregivers knew how many panties his daughter had. This question aimed to encourage the other participants to reflect on the level of men's involvement in raising their children, instead of just complaining about their partners. This provocation exposes a reality in which men take little responsibility for raising their children, something noticeable by the lack of discussions or experiences in which they have talked to



their children about everyday and intimate topics. Men's concern about exercising paternity often only manifests itself when this role is formally called upon, usually in specific and specific situations. However, rethinking paternity as a way for men to become emotionally involved and establish closer ties with partners and daughters is essential to deconstructing hegemonic masculinity. This includes expanding the dimension of care as an integral part of the male experience.

However, care is still culturally naturalized as a feminine attribution, while men are often encouraged to adopt an emotionally distant and 'cold' posture. This emotional distance is linked to the fear that emotional involvement and the expression of vulnerabilities may be perceived as a threat to masculinity, highlighting the need to rethink these social norms.

Active fatherhood refers to the emotional involvement of men in all phases of reproductive planning, pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum period, and child development, to strengthen healthy bonds between caregivers and their children. This concept has gained notoriety, especially on social media, and has been disseminated by individual and collective actions of men or groups who share information about raising and providing physical (bathing, sleeping, changing diapers, feeding) and emotional (managing tantrums, understanding the stages of development) care for children, based on affectionate attitudes and non-violent communication, respecting child well-being. In this sense, active fatherhood is not limited to a search for equality between maternal and paternal roles, but promotes a broader perspective of equity, considering all subjects involved in family dynamics (Moura; Damasceno, 2021). Working on active fatherhood implies breaking with paradigms since both men and women can exercise it. This approach is associated with a disposition of 'attitude', readiness, and proactivity that are essential in the exercise of the paternal role (Brasil, 2018; Silva, 2019).

However, rethinking masculinity must go beyond the experience of fatherhood, since gender relations are shaped since childhood, and redefining them is an essential step to breaking the historical association between masculinity, aggression, and machismo. However, patriarchal and machista ideology still operates as a guiding structure in the construction of male identities (Rangel et al., 2017).

The discussion about masculinity, however, is plural and intersectional, crossed by social markers such as economic class, ethnicity, gender (cis/trans), religion, and geographic location. It is essential to listen to the voices of these men so that their effective inclusion in the dimension of care occurs, promoting the deconstruction of hegemonic patterns that sustain masculinities (Gaspodini et al., 2017).



Another subject who participates in the documentary asks why no one prepares for fatherhood:

And here's a question I raise, why doesn't anyone prepare for fatherhood? It seems like a divine light will come when the child is born and will illuminate our being and us, right? From that moment on, you are a father, right? But love is not built overnight, a relationship is not built overnight. To take care of a child, you need to connect on an emotional level, and for that, you need to get in touch with emotions that perhaps you, as a man, have never allowed yourself [...] (Participant N)

Loving investment in a relationship and in caring for children is not limited to providing material resources, such as money and food, nor to simply playing the role of 'man of the house' or acting as a provider. More than that, participant N expresses his understanding that love implies connecting emotionally and overcoming the emotional barriers that many men face. This difficulty in identifying and expressing emotions may be related to a condition known as alexithymia, which impairs the ability to recognize and understand one's feelings and those of others, negatively impacting the development of empathy.

In the Western context, there is no culturally established connection between masculinity and fatherhood, unlike women, who are immediately associated with the ability to bear and care for children. Motherhood, in this sense, is typified by direct involvement in care, while the father figure occupies a predominantly symbolic space. This model is sustained by patriarchy, which promotes a cultural silence around discussions about male roles in care and parenting.

As a consequence, both paternity and masculinities become unreflective, since accessing territories related to care requires dealing with vulnerability — an aspect often rejected by men since emotional fragility is seen as a threat to the status quo and the maintenance of male privileges (Teperman et al., 2020).

Building emotional bonds, being loving, and caring, and promoting both self-care and care for others clash with the expectations imposed by hegemonic masculinity. In this model, such characteristics are often associated with the feminine and, therefore, seen as threats to the ideal of masculinity, being avoided or repressed.

This context also raises the need to question male responsibility when mentioning the concept of 'protection'. What, in fact, do men seek to protect when assuming this role? Is fragility perceived as a risk of 'loss of masculinity'? Many men who take on the role of 'protectors' end up reproducing patriarchal logic, in which the father figure delegates responsibility for care and emotional and domestic tasks to women. Participant O highlighted that there are three dimensions often associated with fatherhood: protection,



procreation, and provision. Although these aspects are not irrelevant, he emphasizes the importance of expanding this understanding, arguing that the man-father — and, by extension, other men — should also be actively involved in the dimension of care, breaking with the idea that this responsibility is exclusively female.

So in the past, there were three pillars. The pillar of protection, procreation, and provision. So the transformation into active fatherhood means leaving behind the issue of simple protection and moving on to care. So it is no longer a father who comes in and solves things. Now we have a father who takes care. So it is a father who is no longer sporadically present, but is present, no longer has a passive attitude, and has an active attitude (Participant O)

Portraying the three aspects mentioned, reinforced protection The idea that men are responsible for protecting their families and communities is based on a gender construct that associates masculinity with strength, courage, and the ability to face dangerous situations. This expectation imposes significant pressure on men, who need to demonstrate resilience and emotional control. Protection also extends to the emotional realm, in which men must provide stability and security in their family and emotional relationships.

Procreation, in turn, is associated with the traditionally established role that men must fertilize a woman, contributing to the perpetuation of the species. This conception reinforces the expectation of sexual potency and the generation of offspring as central elements of male identity.

Provision, on the other hand, refers to the role of men as financial providers for the family, often represented by the concept of 'head of the family', a construct historically naturalized by patriarchy, which associates male value and identity with the ability to financially support the family nucleus.

On the other hand, the participant also highlights the importance of care as an essential function in the paternal experience. According to Ayres (2001), care involves an intersubjective relationship between two or more people, aiming to minimize suffering and promote well-being, considering the knowledge and practices necessary for this task. Therefore, care should not be understood as an exclusively female responsibility, but rather shared among all family members, including men, so that it is comprehensive and effective. Assigning care only to women limits the male experience, resulting in men who neglect both caring for others and themselves or who delegate this function entirely to third parties (Ribeiro et al., 2017).



CONCLUSION

There is a growing concern among some men to deconstruct hegemonic masculinity, seeking to reflect critically on their attitudes and the impacts they generate on themselves and others. The documentary *The Silence of Men* illustrates this reality and is part of a feminist perspective, by highlighting men who strive to promote gender equality and equity. However, this discussion needs to be expanded and deepened in different contexts, since most men still do not demonstrate an active commitment to taking responsibility for this care movement.

The construction of healthy masculinities is viable, as long as paths that go beyond blaming or victimizing men are recognized. To achieve this, it is essential to effectively implement public policies, with the leading involvement of professionals in health, education, and other areas, in addition to significant action by society and the State in redefining masculinities.



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