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Masculinities in Cuba: Description and Analysis of a Case Study from a Gender Perspective

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Abstract

This study aims to deepen our discussion about Cuban men's current perception about hegemonic masculinity, based on an extensive literary review and a survey focusing on 125 males who attend a Mental Health Center in Havana. Using gender as a concept and category to unravel the relations between sexual difference and inequality, the authors present the results of their descriptive and transversal research, designed to address multiple cases, from a qualitative methodological perspective (QMP method) and compare them with other findings, especially from Latin America. The research techniques applied, expose how the patriarchal culture continues imposing a burden on the minds of many Cuban men, while they also exhibit the rise of a new generation which enjoys a less genitalist sexuality, willing to sharing their new outlook and beginning to manifest a liberating and positive distance from machismo.

Keywords: Gender, Masculinity in Cuba, Hegemonic Masculinity, Machismo, Types of masculinities.



Masculinidades en Cuba: Descripción y Análisis de un Caso de Estudio desde una Perspectiva de Género

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Resumen

Con el objetivo de ahondar sobre la percepción que acerca de la masculinidad hegemónica poseen actualmente los hombres cubanos, luego de una extensa revisión bibliográfica se estudian 125 varones que acuden a un Centro de Salud Mental de La Habana. Haciendo uso del género como concepto y categoría para desentrañar las relaciones de diferencia y desigualdad sexual, las autoras presentan los resultados de su investigación, descriptiva y transversal, con un diseño de casos múltiples y una perspectiva metodológica cualitativa (Método IAP) y los comparan con otros hallazgos, en especial de Latinoamérica. Fueron aplicadas diferentes técnicas de indagación que exponen la carga que la cultura patriarcal sigue aplicando en las mentalidades de muchos hombres cubanos, pero también exhiben a una generación naciente, que disfruta de una sexualidad no tan genitalista, comparte la iniciativa y comienza a manifestar un liberador y positivo desprendimiento del machismo.

Palabras clave: Género, Masculinidad en Cuba, Masculinidad hegemónica, Machismo, Tipos de masculinidades.

“The struggle is not against the male, it is against ignorance”
(Castillo, 1885, p. 67)

We become men and women through a long process of learning which, although it begins at birth, carries with it expectations articulated since pregnancy, through expressions such as: “if it is a girl, I would like her to be like her mother: tender, gentle and intelligent. And if it is a boy, like the father and grandfather: strong, brave, enterprising and seductive”. This demonstrates the social nature of gender and the need to understand how differences related to sexuality are perceived, established and exercised, rather than treating males and females as sexed beings.

In this sense, gender prioritizes practices of what is interpreted as masculine or feminine, and culturally differentiates gender by specific ways of acting and thinking (Hernandez, 2000). This process of socialization teaches people – in this case, men - to respond to the demands of social conceptions and identities, expressing this through their behavior (Rivero, 2008, p.4). Furthermore, it poses an invitation to get back in touch with their childhood history, couple relationships and parental ties, and reflect about their social and cultural characteristics in order to understand the basis of misogyny and male double standards (Garda, 2005).

Hence, all individuals incorporate ways in which they can proceed more or less consistently according to the demands of their group, within a specific timeframe, context and space, showing that we are not dealing with a static construct (Hernández, 2006, p.12), but rather one where change is feasible. On the other hand, this also imposes the challenge of studying both males and females and without excluding either.

A glance at the study of masculinities from an International and Latin-American perspective

Since the 1980s, in the Anglo-Saxon world (USA, Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom) the first studies on masculinity under the name of Men's Studies, were initiated. Michael Kimmel (1992, p.130), one of the most prominent authors on this issue, gives visibility to the ideology of masculinity as a condition of male liberation, and points out that: “If men have noticed that we are a gender, it is because women have been pressing

us for a long time to do so”. Meanwhile in 2002, Peter Beattie, PhD in Latin American History, examines various studies dedicated to this issue in Latin America, by discussing Gutman’s work—on men’s behavior in the working class, - Melhuus and Kristinstolen—about masculine gender roles in Latin American countries,—as well as work by Lumsden, Schaefer and Carrier, who focused on the treatment of homosexuality. Beattie concludes by making reference to how these studies provided a new way of thinking to understand dominant social identities and associated behaviors.

The proposed work supports, through examples taken from a qualitative study among Cuban men, the need—already established by other authors—to disseminate the differentiation and independence of masculinity in its various constructs, visualizing them by virtue of pre-existing socially defined differences (Figueroa, 2008, 2009; González & Fernández, 2010; González & Fernández, 2014).

Our proposal stems from a hegemonic definition that recognizes individual and collective identities in our continent (Cf Kaufman, 1994; Kimmel, 1994; Connell, 1995; Parrini, 2000, p.4). This model contemplates a series of mandates acknowledged in professional practice in association with social constructions: “being a man means being a provider, heterosexual, active, fearless, resolves conflict by means of violence, does not bow down, and maintains control, power and competence.” Such mandates legitimize the forming of dominant and culturally authorized groups with a given social order. Thus, male identity is built upon a differentiation from the feminine, as a reaction to, rather than as a result of, a process of identification. Masculine identity revolves around what characterizes patriarchal culture, with a predominance of power in economic, political and social arenas, in which the feminine is of a “lower nature”. The child learns to “be different” from the person with whom he has the closest contact: his mother (Badinter, 1993; Gilmore, 1994; Menjivar, 2004), or as is commonly assumed, he resists everything that is deemed feminine in order to mark a boundary that leaves homosexuality on the opposite side. This is because “hegemonic masculinity by definition, establishes the existence of a male otherness that does not meet the expectations and patterns required for being ‘male’ in a given socio-cultural and spatial context. [Therefore], power relationships not only involve looking toward another gender, but also toward intra-gender relationships,

that establish differential patterns” (Gonzalez & Macari, 2011, p. 81). Ultimately, masculinity would seem to be a reward which must be fought for.

Since all cultures develop patterns and meanings that define men and women’s actions (Rocha & Díaz-Loving, 2005), communities create their own exclusive image through cultural sanctions, rituals or tests of skill and strength (Riso, 1998; Meler, 2000; Menjívar, 2004). In Cuba, for example, the initiation process of men’s sex lives begins with masturbation, as well as frequent joking, that reaffirms their masculinity through seductive behavior, all of which tends to peak if they happen to be involved with multiple partners (Alvarez, 2002).

At the same time, the father figure is characterized by parameters such as law, authority and distance, which determine what the Canadian psychologist Corneau (1989) called “missing father,” a more complete concept than the one commonly used (“absent father”). The former, indicates that the father is physically present yet unable to provide the emotional and bodily contact that accompanies the lack of parental affection in the construction of the masculine identity in men in general (Corneau, 1991) and the associated physical distance, inexpressiveness and emotional restriction.

This does not exclude those men who have defied their social groups of reference by undertaking activities that are commonly carried out by women in the domestic sphere per se, such as child rearing, in which case they are frequently the object of repression by their peers. Encounters between men in everyday life tend to be driven by power, competitiveness and potential conflict; they can be partners, collaborators, be loyal and affectionate, but always under the command of control. This leads to what Connell (1997, p.39-42) called: “the four types of masculinity”, which from his perspective, does not refer to gender identities, but rather to historically developed behavior paradigms. These typologies “coexist with the hegemonic model, as a prototype of male behavior that dominates the power relations in the gender system and from which the rest of the types of masculinities are established and positioned” (quoted by Monzón, 2012, p.2).

Differences begin to be revealed between the identity-forming processes of men that involve multiple power relations of gender, which means that

there are different ways of being men. Connell (1997, p.39) adds the subordinate masculinity (where the most evident is the gay type of masculinity, although it is not the only one; it also includes heterosexuals who are expelled from the circle of legitimacy when there exists some symbolic confusion associated to femininity), the complicit masculinity (with related elements that include those who, associated with the hegemonic model, do not fit into the hegemonic masculinity type and their complicity resides in the way in which they carry out the family division of labor without the tensions or risks of occupying the front lines of the patriarchy). There is also the marginalized masculinity, which expresses “those relationships between masculinities in dominant and subordinate classes or in ethnic groups.” The marginalized-authoritative correspondence can also exist between subordinate masculinities, given that it is always relative to the dominant group’s authorization (Connell, 1997, p.42).

This degree of precision is important, because the concept of hegemonic masculinity overshadows the other forms of masculinity that coexist in everyday life without belonging to the hegemonic-subordinate criteria. In this sense, we must refer to machismo (term which coins its magnification as the center of power and places the male-man at its core) which, besides being a universal trend, is rooted in the Latin American continent. In the case of Cuba, since the 19th century, machismo is instilled from childhood as something natural, not only in males, but even in women who have attempted to transgress the male role, and are singled out as “tomboys”, perceived as someone who usurps something that should only belong to the male (Gonzalez, 2009, p.3).

However, historically this also implies great social pressure on males, preventing them from yielding to pain, asking for help under any circumstance, pressuring them to use alcohol, making it unacceptable for them to cry and instead encouraging them to be violent and aggressive whenever possible (Muñón, 2013,p.1). By not being able to express their feelings and emotions freely, men have also been deprived of fully enjoying their children’s affection, rendering them prone to distancing themselves from vital spaces such as the family (Rivero, 2005; Quaresma, Ulloa & Sperling, 2013). As it was well raised by Petersen (2003, p.56-57), it is necessary to overcome the essentialist and dichotomous perspectives that

influence the definition of the masculine in only one direction, reflect on the use of categories and, where necessary, rethink their strategic value.

What has happened in Cuba?

In interpersonal relationships established between Cuban males, the authors have observed discomfort in their clinical practice, due to reasoning process as those described in these models. In this regard, it is interesting to remember that this nation's history testifies to facts and characters where "manliness" is constantly reaffirmed by killing, fearlessness and by standing out due to their bellicose bravery. An example of this is the feat of Major Ignacio Agramonte who with a group of mambi volunteers rescued Manuel Sanguily with machete blows against a Spanish column that was carrying rifles; and the mambi General, Antonio Maceo, who expressed that "freedom is not something to be begged for, it must be conquered with the blade of the machete." As González (2004, p.1) ratified: "In Cuba, wars have been one of the main sources for determining the masculinity of men [...]. One example would suffice to illustrate this in Cuba's history with José Martí, one of the main organizers of the 1895 war, a brilliant [intellectual] genius, who was very much questioned for his poor military skills and his non-participation in the battle field". Combativeness, aggressiveness, strength, power, control, competition and authority are also reinforced as values that characterize great men.

Studies of masculinity on the island begin to take shape during the second half of the 1990s. Pioneers in this field were: Arés (1996) research addressed the cost of being male by using the category "expropriations of masculinity;" Rivero Pino (1998, 2000) assessed the social representations of the parental role and its psychological and socio-political implications; Álvarez (2002) conducted a socio-cultural exploration of masculinity as well as its transformations in relation to transsexual individuals; and González (2002) took up sociologist Luis Robledo's concept of masculinity as a product of almost one hundred years of history of hegemonic masculinity as a synonym for machismo, linked with concepts of manhood and virility "validated in Cuba as a form of culture [that], despite being subjected to much criticism in the last two decades, seems to enjoy deep roots in different social groups, both on the island and in the Cuban

diaspora” (González, 2004, p.1). Finally, Díaz (2012a, 2012b) raises the issue in the mass media, highlighting the importance of couples sharing the initiative and with regard to assuming more caring responsibilities of children during the postnatal period.

Another important distinction can be appreciated in the screening of the film “Strawberry and Chocolate” (1993) by directors Gutiérrez Alea and Carlos Tabío, which questions one of the most exclusive masculinities: that of homosexuals, given that homophobia persists in our society and, like the machismo, is internalized in our educational representations.

With the arrival of the new millennium there appear workshops that aim to promote the debate on this content, unpublished even at the social level, such as Masculinities and violence in young people (2002) by the Federation of Cuban women; Masculinities and the culture of peace (2000-2004) and those carried out by the National Centre for Sex Education (Cenesex by its Spanish initials), which focus on the analysis of violence as the basis of power relations between genders, male vulnerability to pain, sexuality and parenthood (Álvarez, 2002). In 2009 the scientific section “Masculinities” is formalized in the framework of the Multidisciplinary Cuban Society for the Study of Sexuality (Socumes by its Spanish initials), which belongs to the Academy of Sciences of Cuba. Integrated by professionals from different areas of knowledge and regions of the country, it has among its objectives to develop research projects on the issue of masculinity and its implications in Cuban reality, to promote the publication and dissemination of results that foster human development with a focus on gender and, to help train human resources regarding “masculinities” (Rivero, 2008).

In this unequal universe in constant evolution, not only is this a moment of transition, but one of true crisis (Hernández, 2000). In this context it is reasonable to make reference to Thompson when he says: “masculinity [...] might not exist. Masculinity as something monolithic (manliness) does not exist: there are only masculinities, many ways of being a man” (Thompson, 1993, p.11). So, in addition to the predominant model, “there are as many male ways to fail, as male forms of success” (Thompson, 1993, p.12).

Our Intervention Experience: From the Hegemonic Model to the New Masculinities

Even though the social changes brought by the Cuban revolution have attempted to deconstruct different stereotypes, and even when much of the work done has been aimed at adjusting the legal system against social exclusion, the prevailing concept is so ingrained, that many people, especially males, are reluctant to letting go, because they feel that it would make them lose control. Still, ever-increasing conflicts occur and a lack of knowledge about how to proceed persists, which explains that a high percentage of men have begun going to counseling with discomforts associated with their interrelationships. This very circumstance was the motivational basis of this work, whose aim was to study the perception of hegemonic masculinity in a group of men who attended a Havana Mental Health Center.

Methodology

Study group

Intentional sample composed of 125 Cuban men from a construction company of Havana, of ages between 21 and 60 years and a minimum education of 12th grade, during the period from January 2011 to January 2012.

Tools and techniques

1) The investigation

Through a semi-structured interview developed by the specialists of the study, data was collected for the preparation of clinical psychiatric histories, which included: age, marital status and educational level, a description of the subject's upbringing, relationships with both parents, affections, demands, distribution of domestic tasks, school history, educational achievement and sexist education. It also includes relationships with peers and among women, genital manifestations, sexual games, first ejaculatory experiences during adolescence, description of physical development, history of couple relationships (number of stable and unstable partners,

reasons for separation, duration of parallel relationships), among other aspects.

2) Group dynamics

- Presentation techniques: Participants wrote down their personal information, expressed their reason for attending, and listed their expectations as a result of this treatment.
- SWOT: On a flip chart everyone wrote the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats they face as males. In teams, they drew a man's figure and described it, stating what a male should be like.
- Chipping away at ideas: Each participant expressed his understanding of sexuality, sex, gender, and was asked to provide different denominations for the penis, its different functions in various countries and other related contents. These concepts were then defined among the group.
- Brain storm: Definitions were discussed and written on a blackboard debating each one as a group.
- Movie debate: The documentary "Sex-pleasure in Life" (spoken in Spanish) was projected for educational purposes allowing patients to identify different phases of female and male genital responses and reflect on myths related to these topics, and at the end, the group's impressions were discussed. The Cuban Cenesex documentary "Teresa's Portrait", about erotic massages between couples and the American movie "Kramer vs Kramer" were also projected and viewed by the group.
- Interactive conferences: Here, each of the issues was addressed in depth, allowing for discussion when participants so desired.
- Games about Myths and Beliefs: Cards expressing various myths and beliefs were distributed. Each participant had to read, discuss and analyze them with the group. The coordinator intervened with an explanation of masculinities as the debate for each card concluded.
- Identification of violence: The group was asked to consider a problem situation from their own experience that related to violence as well as its treatment by different institutions. Narrated cases were discussed.
- The Neighbor's House: The activity consisted of a dramatization technique in which conflicts between couples were worked out from the male perspective, emphasizing their preferences, virtues and defects.

3) Participant observation

The main observer remained active in the group in order to allow him to understand, by direct interaction, the meaning of each story and interpret the implicit speech symbols of each intervention, not only by what was expressed verbally, but also from the expression of the emotions, gestures and silences, all of which was recorded for later analysis of content of each work session.

Methodological perspective: Qualitative, designed for multiple cases. Type of research: descriptive and transversal. From a gender perspective, and using a methodology which supports greater openness for qualitative studies, addressing the broad complexity of this social construction.

Hence the use of Participatory Action-Research (PAR), which facilitated comprehension of the meaning and interpretation of what happened with each patient. This paradigm is radically different from the traditional social research in both methodological and epistemological terms, because it addresses the need to learn codes that are being expressed in the field by the participants in the study. Its application follows a spiral model of successive cycles, including diagnosis, planning, action, observation, and reflection-evaluation. So the goal is not only to identify the discomforts, experiences and feelings of the men as a means of exploration (the results of which are presented in this article), but also as a way to instill change by exposing their needs and hidden feelings through this experience (expressed in their personal stories), allowing them to understand each other as individuals, subject to social mandates that genuinely take over (Garda, 2004, 2007). In this regard, adopting a gender perspective offers the necessary tools to describe and analyze the power relations of men in the construction of their male identity, as well as achieving a reconsideration of the social learning it implies.

Procedure

The study began with the implementation of a semi-structured interview with each patient, based on informed consent. There were five sessions of four hours for each group, using participatory group techniques to promote reflection, analysis and dialogue. A total of 12 sessions were conducted. This helped maintain the interest of participants who were studying and

learning about their own experiences, allowing individual and collective participation and promoting respect for others' views. Each group was composed of 10 men. Different teaching formats were used: audiovisual media (videos, power point presentations), pencils, paper, music equipment, dramatizations, and other PAR techniques.

Each session began with reflections on the previous meetings and discussions of practical activities, thus creating a climate of awareness and commitment to the issue. The first session was designed for group integration, establishing objectives, expectations and a therapeutic contract, defining the contents and the methodology. Then the thematic plan was explained and, based on the group's reflections, the Coordinator integrated and elaborated the conclusions. At the end of each session an evaluation was conducted as summarized below.

Operational description of the sessions

During the first session a diagnostic survey was applied to identify knowledge about the topics. Participants were asked to add their expectations. Other forms of evaluation included rapporteurs during the workshops and attendance record and participatory techniques. The conceptual framework was centered on sexuality (including issues about sexually transmitted diseases, the use of the condoms and associated myths) as well as gender and the approximation to masculinities. Subsequently the concepts of violence, body image, self-esteem, self-care and couple situations in the current context were discussed. Evaluation was based on collecting the main ideas contributed by the group and encouraging communication about criteria and opinions shared throughout.

The second session was directed to the approximation to the masculinities. It included, among other topics, a reflection on traditional models, beliefs, patterns that govern male behavior, the cult of the "phallus" and current trends.

In the third session, once the new concepts, ideas and beliefs discussed had been reinforced, patients were asked to identify the definitions associated with gender and abuse in their respective relationships, as well as their social and individual costs. From a gender perspective, participants analyzed the barriers associated with the persistence of violence in different

social spheres, sexual rights as a containment framework for violence against males and they evaluated risks and damages inflicted upon women, other men and upon themselves. The aim is to internalize the importance of achieving equity (respect of intrinsic differences) and equal personal and social rights and opportunities, both for men and women throughout life and in all of its contexts. As a conclusion, each member was asked to express in a single phrase, how this activity was useful to them.

The fourth session addressed body image and self-worth issues. It provided tools to help reevaluate the body, starting with a warm-up activity involving having participants affectionately touch several of their own body parts (“do you know what a kiss is?” and “do you know what a hug is?”). Self-care and self-esteem techniques were taught, and participants were guided through breathing, concentration, hatha yoga, individual and couples massage as well as relaxation exercises. Visual images of erotic couples massage were projected on a screen for the purpose of stimulating the use of body therapies and encouraging participants to be affectionate partners, with more intimate and satisfying sexual relations, while at the same time helping them to reduce tensions and develop values such as privacy and communication. The session ended with an evaluation technique: PNI (highlighting the Positive, Negative, and the Interesting aspects of the session).

The theme of the fifth session was *The Couple in Today’s Context*, designed to provide tools and updated knowledge about the main conflicts that affect couples. The session was approached as a space for personal growth in relation to, and accepting responsibility for a real commitment in their individual relationships, using participatory techniques and knowledge obtained in previous sessions. At the end of the session, participants evaluated the psycho-dramatic technique and its effects on them, after having watched the film *Kramer vs. Kramer*.

The sixth session was dedicated to the assessment, unification and closure of the workshop. The purpose was to integrate all of the issues considered, learn about how the group felt during the different activities and assess their level of comprehension about the issues addressed. The methodology used to learn about the accomplishments and results of the workshop served to identify participants’ level and criteria of appreciation regarding group work, as well as any changes that might have been

produced in the participants as a result of the program. The group was asked to form teams and answer the question what appealed to you the most? while specifying the intervention strategies, including the issues covered during the various sessions. The Coordinator acted as moderator and at the end made observations and integrated the responses with the knowledge provided during the workshop. After a brain storming session, the program culminated with a final survey and a recreational activity.

Analysis of results

In all the techniques used, particularly the Games about Myths and Beliefs, it became evident how the power, domination, competition and control are essential to hegemonic masculinity. Vulnerability, feelings and emotions in men are signs of femininity and should be avoided, as well as intimacy with other men, because it either makes them vulnerable or puts them at a disadvantage in terms of the competition over women, or it might imply effeminacy and homosexuality. Self-control, control over others and their environment, are essential to make men feel safe. A man who asks for help or is leaning on others, shows signs of weakness and incompetence. Men's rational and logical thinking is the higher form of intelligence to face problems.

Various traditional patterns of hegemonic masculinity still survive, and the ones that stand out amongst them with greater force are the sexual schemes focused on performance: "In a relationship, the man is the one who has the resources", "the man knows everything and should address the situation", "I like women who are thin, delicate, passive and good mothers for my home", "and on the streets, I will look for those who are sexually aggressive", "a man is always ready to have sex", "women like us to be unfaithful because it shows that we are good lovers and that we are the stronger sex", "I am the one who brings money, food, support and who resolves whatever needs I and my children have", "the most important thing is penetration; never mind the fondling", "in sex, what matters is performance", "a large penis is important for a woman's gratification and pleasure", "the more bizarre the sexual positions, the more pleasurable sex is". All of this coincides with the previous observations made by Dr. Arrondo (2006, p.299).

Therefore, success with women is associated with their subordination in the relationship, sexuality being the principal means to test masculinity. But despite this, men do not assume the need to have knowledge about the subject which, in fact, tends to be poor. It was evident that myths and prejudices persist and are transmitted from generation to generation, limiting their enjoyment and sexual surrender and preventing them from being independent in their enjoyment according to their own needs: “a large penis gives a man more sexual power than a small penis”, “masturbation is only for adolescent males”, “good sex requires orgasm”, “orgasm should be simultaneous to achieve full sexual enjoyment”, “asexually functional man has an erection whenever he sees a woman”, “having power and control is essential to feeling manly”. Men rival and compete constantly: “I am better than him, since I can have more partners, and I also have sex several times a night”, “I have enough money to make my wife and my lovers happy”.

All of this contributes to lessen the enjoyment of affection when it comes to giving and receiving: “Don’t touch me, no kissing between us”, “I won’t have any man give me a massage”, “After finishing and ejaculating several times, I sleep and prepare for the next round”, “Demonstrations of affection in men are signs of femininity, and should be avoided”. In addition, these men present completely reckless behaviors regarding Sexually Transmitted Disease/HIV, since they do not accept responsibility for the consequences of their actions, and therefore do not take precautions for safe sex. They discard the use of contraceptive methods and more so, the use of condoms: “Condom? Preservative? No condom for me, women are responsible for taking care of themselves”.

Men’s masculinity is not only confirmed through sex. They must also feel powerful and economically successful in order to maintain high self-esteem (Cf [Fernández, 2001, p.154-155](#)). Therefore, professional and work related triumphs are indicators of masculinity, and self-esteem is based on achievements in the financial and working spheres. The males see themselves as providers, as the axis in a relationship, with the resulting costs. And in those situations in which the woman is the one playing this role, their testimonies confirm how this leads men to question their manhood and feel the need to seek advice in a state of diminished self-esteem and often, depression: “I’m not worthy; I’m a piece of shit, because she’s supporting me”. Society justifies these costs at any price, given that

financial success and leadership are perceived as social virtues of public life and that is, undoubtedly, considered to be a masculine domain, par excellence.

In the group subjected to this study there is a tendency to justify what it means to be male, particularly regarding the demands of: sexuality, erotic sex practices, the body, everyday life, power, force, violence and success associated with victory over another. Using concrete examples described in the sessions, this was expressed in phrases such as: “Men don't cry or complain”, “a man must take an active role in sexual relationships”, “I am seductive and have several women at the same time”, “I'm an athletic guy”, “no one is better than me”, “I solve whatever problems come my way”, “I decide what happens, because I'm the one who has the money”.

Reflections revolve around the inequities in power relations that were instilled as children and then reinforced by parents and the patriarchal culture: “That's how we are, period”, “We don't know any other way of being males and least of all, after all these years”, “I'd like to be different, but how would I be? And what would others think of me, if I were?”, “We have to struggle to eliminate those humiliations”, “We'd like to face reality and look at things differently”. They confront each other and vie with one another; they cannot allow themselves to have weaknesses. Even among friends they cannot display any degree of vulnerability. Affective manifestations such as hugging and kissing are not frequent, and corporal distance is observed even with their children: “As his father, I may hold his hand, but, no kissing”. Anything associated with situations that make them seem fragile must be avoided. In their subjectivity, there are still thoughts associated with different patterns of socialization, conditioning the norms of masculinity and influencing their behavior: “I was taught to be like this since I was in my mother's belly, and then my parents, my grandparents and even my teachers, how can I possibly change that?” Different cultural models that associate everything with masculinity and validate the use of violence in the face of conflict resolution are persistent.

Other enduring trends, formerly described by Arrondo (2006), include those in which macho men believe that today's ills are a result of women having gained so much ground due to men's lack of aggressive vigilance; or they are convinced that they have ceded ground, and therefore remain trapped in their eternal commitment as gifted males who dominate the

world. Another (non-minority) group, has taken on the responsibility of recovering the decadent essence of masculinity by refusing to be affectionate or faithful, or to forsake what they consider their innate initiative: “I do not clean, wash, or make my bed, I’m unique”, “women don’t understand how the male hormone works”, “those surges of hormones compel us to act manly all the time”, “always on top, ejaculate, and take off”.

However, the so-called “new men” were also discovered as a hopeful dawning, in almost half of the study subjects under 35 years of age. These men’s attributes and behaviors did not respond to the traditional model: “we like loving ourselves and being loved”, “we like to get to know our partner and have her know us”, “we like sharing the initiative”, “we respect women”; “we avoid risks: we do not drink and drive, we drive cautiously, open the door carefully, wear a seatbelt, avoid using the cell phone in the car while driving”, “we talk to our partner”, “we use condoms”, “we seek spirituality”, “we listen to our body”, “we carry out artistic activities, exploration and enjoy nature”.

Discussion

In the sample of Cuban men explored in this case study, and comparing other authors’ findings, we encountered that:

1. Traditional models of hegemonic masculinity continue to appear reflected in anti-social patterns, unequal power relations and negative attributes such as violence, repressed emotions and exposure to risks, coinciding with previous traits reported by González (2009), Serrano (2012), as well as by Quaresma & Ulloa (2013) in their research in different regions of Cuba. Myths, taboos and prejudices that influence behavior are observed and configured around the legitimization and disapproval of the body and related practices.

2. This pattern coincides with the observations in other Latin American societies, as described by Rocha-Sánchez & Díaz-Loving (2005) in Mexico, noting that, even though opportunities for women in many areas are changing with respect to men, the stereotyped vision appears not to be changing at the same speed as the social transformations. Meanwhile, in

Brazil, Nascimento & Segundo (2011, p.27) found that at present, housing and child care continue to be considered a priority job for women, who should “take care of their home and cook for the family,” while decision-making in the home continues to be, at least in half of the sample, the man’s prerogative, as the one “who should have the last word”.

3. In addition, the study highlighted how Cubans displayed restrictive conditioning and gaps in knowledge regarding sexuality issues, despite the fact that sexual education campaigns have been sponsored for many years throughout the country. Despite the feasibility of accessing contraception at a very low cost, Cubans have not yet found the proper means of communication to convey the relevance of adopting this practice, behaving irresponsibly against the risk of pregnancy and the transmission of STDs and HIV. This is consistent with what has happened in other countries such as Mexico (Cf [Figueroa, 2000](#)) and Argentina, where most of the men claimed, beyond any doubt, that they had greater sexual desire-need than women, although their justifications varied according to socioeconomic levels of the interviewees ([Manzelli, 2006](#)). Even when this situation was mirrored in the study conducted in Brazil, here at least, the interviewees recognized the importance of learning about their partner’s sexual preferences ([Nascimento & Segundo, 2011](#)).

4. Difficulties in developing a positive self-image that support their self-esteem were noted, as well as an inability to feel and express their affections: “I’m not feeling what I used to feel,” “I don’t feel macho enough”, “I can’t satisfy her like I did before”, “I’m worthless”, “I can’t love her as I did before”.

5. At the same time, there appear to be fractures in the traditional generic constructions of the Cuban male which reveal the presence of other masculinities beyond the hegemonic model and which respond to the huge questions that males have before them, in relation to things such as: an adequate bond with women, and defending significant personal and social victories without conflict of identification, among others. The presence of these positive models of masculinity was identified mainly among men less than 36 years of age, and brings hope of renewed values in the younger generations. The emergence of groups of young men who are finding new meanings within their daily lives regarding hegemonic masculinity and power represent coincides with what Doull, Oliffe, Knight & Shoveller

(2013, p.342) recently reported in Canada, arguing that the new generation is re-shaping the characteristics of ideal masculinity and incorporating characteristics that are closer to their own life experiences (equality and emotionality).

6. This new model is also consistent with findings by Dr. Figueroa in certain regions of Mexico in 2011, with respect to some men's engagement in activities formerly carried out by women in their role as caregivers (showing a radical change in their relationship as parents and couples) and in their personal and professional expectations, which, according to Figueroa, brings us closer to gradual changes that are already emerging (albeit slowly) in male identity.

7. We also find groups that were subjected to social pressure wielded upon them (and which they placed upon themselves), in order to belong and gain acceptance as well as social approval. The ways of being men, alert us regarding many men's impossibility of enjoyment according to their own needs. This is consistent with Ibarra's study on masculinities in Uruguay, who found that, in the face of emotional depression and frustrating situations, males felt that nobody could help them or that they could not ask for help, due to the omnipotence that characterized them as men (Ibarra, 2011, p.40).

Conclusions and recommendations

Groups of men who have begun to let go of the inherited machismo and are considering that it no longer represents them, are already being detected, not only in some isolated countries but they flourish in Cuba as well. They are trying to enjoy a new male sexuality beyond the fears and doubts, the traumas and impositions, the inhibitions and loneliness, of having to "comply" with violence, exploitation, silence and pretense. And, since we recognize that it is a long-term process which involves social transformations and re-learning, education emerges as a necessary tool to modify these inadequate criteria in both sexes from an early age, and build new ways of seeing and enjoying sexuality from the male perspective. This process of adopting new perspectives could lead to transforming outdated approaches in exchange for new and healthier ones on behalf of both men and women. Therefore, the so-called new men are groups of men who have

benefited from a sexual education that helps them abandon rigid positions and superficial emotional arguments which simplify the binary “are you male or not”, to achieve understanding and respond to their partner’s affection conquering equity, affection, non-violence, participation, negotiation and mental health.

In this regard, it becomes increasingly important to make sure that people who address these issues (in this case, in Cuba) are equipped with the essential knowledge and methodological skills for carrying it out with utmost professionalism and conviction that women and men are not enemies. Both have equal duties and rights within the society, among which are, the enjoyment of healthy, enriching lives, far from violence and disruption, and in the case of males, the creation of a new identity for themselves as men, that prevents them from continuing to feel like the aggressors or the aggrieved.

As it was well pointed out by Suárez, J.C. (2006, p.12), “despite living in a sexist culture that favors power of the male over the female, these stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, which constitute divisive patterns or paradigms, negatively affect both genders because they prevent discovery, development or expression of human qualities and values, without distinction of sex”. Ultimately, educating better human beings constitutes one of the fundamental strategic objectives of our society.

Notes

¹ Phrase taken from Aurelia Castillo, one of the leading edge feminists in Cuba, from a newspaper editorial of *El Fígaro*, on February 24, 1885 (67).

² The same happens to women and even between men and women within their own sex, (Cf Rivero 2008, p.4). In fact, as it has been expressed by Threadgold y Cranny-Francis (1990), Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994), and later highlighted by Petersen en el 2003 (58), the specific historical and social constructs of masculinity cannot be dissociated from those of femininity, making it difficult to speak about masculinity without somehow imposing a binary nature to the concept of gender.

³ In this sense, most males disregard the meaning of gender, seen as the building of manhood with its different variables (race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and age) and they focus exclusively on the biological sex as the factor that imposes the expected behavior of the “human male”.

⁴ Such as Kaufman (1994); Gilmore (1994); Seidler (2000); Badinter (1993); Connell (1995); Gutmann (1997); Fuller (1997, 1998) and Viveros (1998), quoted by Jociles (2001).

⁵ Who supports the debate from a gender perspective based on feminist studies.

⁶ Antoinette Fouque, the distinguished feminist, hypothesized that, what is really at the bottom of misogyny is envy, not because of what women are, but because of what they do: their capacity to procreate. (Cf Fouque, 2008, p.194; Fernández, 2011, p.270).

⁷ Meanwhile, the Cuban Section of Masculinities (Cf Rivero, 2010) decided to denominate them operationally as traditional, in transition and ideal model of masculinity, as historical forms that can co-exist in time.

⁸ Where complexities and conflicts experienced with other men, due to this cultural unified masculinity, are ignored (Coles, 2009, p.30).

⁹ Described as the offensive attitudes and behaviors that discriminate and devalue women by considering them inferior with respect to men, in the the Royal Spanish Academy Dictionary (2011), which adds that this discrimination extends to both homosexual men and others who exhibit any trait associated with femininity.[links]

¹⁰ Gutmann, in 1997, describes his perception about this term in México, and in 2002 Beattie analyses and exemplifies how masculinity and machismo are complex and malleable concepts which invite further thought and reinterpretation of individuals and groups, highlighting their connection with gender identity. (Beattie, 2002, p.303).

¹¹ Considered a great example of masculinity, to the point of being the reason for coining the popular phrase, “he has more balls than Antonio Maceo”.

¹² It is true that homophobia has overcome the shameful Military Units for Aid to Production (Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción (UMAP)) which existed from 1965 to 1967, which various authors —such as Lumsden (1996) quoted by Beattie (2002, p.306)—, underscore when describing the treatment of homosexuals during this period in Cuba, a program about which it must be added, was the object of protests by the National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba), as well as by important international allies of the Revolution (Cf Cardenal, 1972; Hillson, 2001).

¹³ As expressed by Garda (2004).

¹⁴ *This change could happen due to the fact that people’s behaviors, motivations and knowledge will be more in line with their own self-definition than with their biological sex, as Rocha observed in his work during 2004 and 2009. Or as Arrondo (2006, p.310) pointed out, because “this group has assumed, simultaneously with women’s liberation, the need of its own transformations; the urgency to liberate themselves at the same time as their traveling companions”.*

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