

EMOTIONAL DISCOURSES IN YOUNG MASCULINITIES The case of young men in Valencia, Spain

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Abstract The aim of this article is to identify the different discourses related to masculinity in young Valencian men based on their narratives about the expression of emotions and feelings and how these are developed in friendship. The research used a qualitative methodology based on focus groups, five groups with young people and one with professionals working with young people. The results of the research allowed us to identify three models of masculinity in relation to the expression of emotions and with the different degrees of emotional connection in friendship relationships: hegemonic masculinity, masculinity in transition and (almost) inclusive masculinity.

Keywords: young men, emotions, masculinity, friendship.

Discursos emocionais nas masculinidades jovens: o caso dos jovens em Valência, Espanha

Resumo O objetivo deste artigo é identificar os diferentes discursos relacionados com a masculinidade em jovens homens valencianos, com base nas suas narrativas sobre a expressão das emoções e sentimentos e como estes se desenvolvem na amizade. O estudo utilizou uma metodologia qualitativa baseada em grupos focais, cinco grupos com jovens e um com profissionais que trabalham com jovens. Os resultados da investigação permitiram identificar três modelos de masculinidade em relação à expressão das emoções e aos diferentes graus de ligação emocional nas relações de amizade: a masculinidade hegemónica, a masculinidade em transição e a masculinidade (quase) inclusiva.

Palavras-chave: jovens, emoções, masculinidade, amizade.

Discours émotionnels dans les jeunes masculinités: le cas des jeunes de Valence, Espagne

Résumé L'objectif de cet article est d'identifier les différents discours liés à la masculinité chez les jeunes hommes de Valence en se basant sur leurs récits concernant l'expression des émotions et des sentiments et comment ils se développent dans l'amitié. L'étude a utilisé une méthodologie qualitative basée sur des groupes de discussion, cinq groupes avec des jeunes et un avec des professionnels travaillant avec des jeunes. Les résultats de la recherche nous ont permis d'identifier trois modèles de masculinité en relation avec l'expression des émotions et les différents degrés de connexion émotionnelle dans les relations amicales: la masculinité hégémonique, la masculinité en transition et la masculinité (presque) inclusive.

Mots-clés: jeunes, émotions, masculinité, amitié.

Discursos emocionales en las masculinidades jóvenes: el caso de los jóvenes en Valencia, España

Resumen El objetivo de este artículo es identificar los diferentes discursos relacionados con la masculinidad en los jóvenes varones valencianos a partir de sus narrativas sobre la expresión de las emociones y sentimientos y cómo estas se desarrollan en la amistad. El estudio utilizó una metodología cualitativa basada en grupos focales,

cinco grupos con jóvenes y uno con profesionales que trabajan con jóvenes. Los resultados de la investigación permitieron identificar tres modelos de masculinidad en relación con la expresión de las emociones y con los diferentes grados de conexión emocional en las relaciones de amistad: la masculinidad hegemónica, la masculinidad en transición y la masculinidad (casi) inclusiva.

Palabras-clave: jóvenes, emociones, masculinidad, amistad.

Introduction

Current debates in the field of masculinities focus primarily on how men are challenging heteronormativity, and traditional gender roles. But these changes are not universal; hence the importance of taking into account contextual, interactional, and situational factors when studying masculinities (Christofidou, 2021).

It is difficult for men who have been socialized within patriarchal conceptions of masculinity to abandon an antagonistic posture toward women or to show solidarity with feminist struggles. Doing so would mean renouncing their masculinity, since a large part of their identity has been built on rejecting the feminine (Martínez, 2014).

It has also been observed that men who feel solidarity with different models of interaction with other men and, especially, with women find it difficult to freely express their thoughts in certain contexts. This is because “the prevailing male voice immediately denounces the individual for his betrayal and tries to silence him with whatever can harm him” (Merlyn, 2021: 599). Thus, the rediscovered affectivity is often individually repressed under the corrective gaze of others, especially the peer group in the case of young people or adolescents.

In order to describe and understand masculinities, it is essential to take the expression of emotions into account, as the two are very closely linked (Randell *et al.*, 2016). Taking into account that emotional manifestations are culturally, historically, and situationally context-specific (de Boise and Hearn, 2017), the main objective of this paper is to analyze the accounts of young men in Valencia (Spain)¹ with respect to the expression of emotions and their connection with the construction of masculinities. In addition, the article also addresses the dimension of friendship in order to contextualize and enable a better understanding of the analysis of emotions, especially in friendship relationships and their possible link to masculinities. The research was carried out in the city of Valencia.

Equality policies in Spain were developed following the approval of the Spanish Constitution (1978) with the incorporation of the article on equal rights (Article 14), along with impetus from the feminist movement and coinciding with more progressive governments (Astelarra, 2005). The first step was the creation of

1 Valencia is a medium-sized city (789,744 inhabitants, according to data from January 2021, National Institute of Statistics), making it the third largest city in Spain, after Madrid (the capital) and Barcelona. Valencia is located on the Mediterranean coast.

the Instituto de la Mujer (Women's Institute) in 1983, whose policies were grouped into a series of Equality Plans (the first between 1988 and 1990). In 2004, particular emphasis was placed on the concept of real equality, mainly as a result of the Ley Orgánica para la Igualdad Efectiva de Mujeres y Hombres (Organic Law for the Effective Equality of Women and Men [L.O. 3/2007]). The need to incorporate work with men has been gradually introduced into the different equality plans.

In the Autonomous Community of Valencia, one of the 17 Autonomous Communities (or regions) that make up the Spanish State, legislation relating to equal rights for men and women has been in place since 1982. The regional law for equality between women and men dates back to 2003 (Ley 9/2003, dated April 2), while in 2012 the comprehensive law on violence against women was implemented within the Autonomous Community of Valencia (Ley 7/2012, dated November 23). Furthermore, since 1985, in Valencia there have been—as there are in other regions of Spain—informal groups of men (peer-to-peer groups), whose objective is to connect men of different ages and from diverse social groups who seek to establish more equal relationships between the genders (Rodríguez-del-Pino and Aguado, 2019).

Despite important advances in equality in Valencian (and Spanish) society in the last decades, a recent quantitative study on youth masculinities in the Valencian Community (Kuric *et al.*, 2022), indicates that 19% of young boys associate masculinity with traditional ideas. Compared to the national average, in the Valencian Community there are more boys who have a traditional view of masculinity (19% compared to 14% of the Spanish average).

Theoretical framework

Adolescence and youth

The consideration of young people in their late teens and early twenties as a social group is closely related to the socioeconomic and cultural context of each historical moment, such that “the concept of youth has evolved over time” (Llopis *et al.*, 2019: 64). This period of life is defined “by key transitional processes such as gaining economic independence, one's own home, forming one's own family and joining the labor market” (Moreno, 2012: 16). In addition, this shift has been accompanied by the prolongation, in terms of age, of youth as a sociological category.

From a social-construction approach, a conceptual delimitation of youth refers to its relational nature, so that the concept “must be produced from the multiple and infinite relationships established by young subjects of both sexes from their different social positions” (Duarte, 2012: 102).

Adolescent boys often actively participate in gender constructions to form their masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Moreover, emotional expressions are strongly influenced by gender, and this is rooted in the emotional socialization of parents towards their offspring, with differences regarding their treatment and behavior depending on whether they are sons or daughters (Goldshmidt and Weller, 2000),

and, subsequently, it is related to the way in which peers, teachers, and others behave towards and address adolescents (West and Zimmerman, 2009).

Emotions and masculinities

Emotions are an aspect of the human condition that are socially modeled, transmitted through codes, encouraged or repressed by social conventions and beliefs, and have a sociohistorical foundation (Enriquez, 2009), which can raise questions about relations. In addition, “the analysis of emotions in relation to men’s gender creates tension between different configurations of masculinity” (Ramírez, 2020: 26).

In this regard, the three main concepts on masculinities — hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995), inclusive masculinity (Anderson, 2008) and the concept of hybrid masculinity (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014) — shed light on how men experience their emotions in different ways.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity refers to the dominant masculinity that ideologically legitimizes unequal practices and relationships of men’s domination of women (Connell, 1995). According to this conception, males repress emotions that are associated with femininity and, therefore, incompatible with hegemonic masculinity (sadness, empathy, fear, tenderness, compassion, love, anguish, etc.), while emotions such as rage and anger are considered legitimate for males to express (Kaufman, 1995; Salguero, 2018). Nevertheless, multiple forms of masculinity have been identified in a variety of countries and in different institutions and sociocultural contexts.

A challenge to the theoretical perspective offered by Connell (1995) comes from the concept of inclusive masculinity proposed by Anderson (2008), according to which inclusive men are inclined towards gender equality, and this is reflected through indicators such as the reduction of sexism, erosion of the patriarchy, and an improvement in men’s attitudes towards women — this being a pattern that is observed in the context of Western countries. Furthermore, these inclusive men adopt traits traditionally associated with femininity and women, such as being more emotionally intimate with male friends or peers in a variety of situations (Christofidou, 2021).

This theory has been criticized for ignoring power relations between genders (O’Neill, 2015) and because these men do not actively challenge the patriarchal system and structural gender inequalities (Christofidou, 2021). For its part, hybrid masculinity seeks to demonstrate how hegemonic masculinities change forms through the incorporation of identity traits usually associated with femininity, as well as subordinate and marginalized masculinities, into the identity and practices of privileged men (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014), adopting softer or hybrid forms (Arxer, 2011). Despite this, hybrid masculinities not only reproduce systems of inequality and power, and legitimize patriarchal domination, but also conceal them. Along the same lines are the studies by Messner (1993, 2007) and Demetriou (2001), who detected transformations in the style of masculinity among some groups of men — being more sensitive and more emotionally expressive — but without resulting in substantial changes in contemporary masculinities.

Gender-constructs influence men's emotional expression. This according to a study of men who attempted suicide, "during childhood, they learned that expressing emotions such as fear and sadness reduced masculine standing, whereas mobilising emotions such as anger and rage through acts of violence could enhance masculine status" (River and Flood, 2021: 923). In general, adolescent masculinity becomes a model of being a male social subject, in which patriarchal sexuality — hegemonic, sexist, homophobic, crude, without concessions or cracks, without doubts, without showing emotions or weakness — increasingly clashes with an inclusive masculinity (Keddie and Bartel, 2020; Anderson and McCormack, 2018) that "shows signs of gradually overcoming those limiting, unequal values, as a result of a subjectivation nourished precisely by the values offered by an alternative model of masculinity" (Venegas, 2020: 20).

In fact, the model provided by hegemonic masculinities is beginning to be questioned, since it fails to provide effective responses to the emotional conflict that usually occurs during adolescence, precisely because of its association with gendered power, as well as in relationships with fathers, which can be a source of tension (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). This implies that men have to progressively "change their ways of being and acting in order to adapt to the dizzying changes that society demands of them" (Rodríguez-del-Pino and Jabbaz, 2022: 121).

Friendship

In the world of young men, friendship is a "horizontal and affiliative bond, marked by preference, reciprocity and shared affection that arises within a voluntary relationship" (Howes, 1987: 253). However, the horizontal bond of friends is habitually superimposed on the vertical bond of parents-children (Hartup, 1989).

The group nurtures young people's gender identities, and bonds are created that sustain them and bring meaning to their lives and projects. The group becomes the vehicle for the production of society (Duarte, 2012). For that reason, in their process of incorporation into society, adolescent individuals devote great efforts to trying to be accepted at all costs by their peer group, going so far as to perform actions that, in other circumstances, they would not perform. Moreover, the rest of the peers are aware of this — consciously or unconsciously — and, therefore, shamelessly exercise control over the individual. This fact is very evident among young men, so that "the young man embodies the socially prescribed role as a way to avoid sanction and/or ostracism" (Martínez and Pérez, 2020: 184).

Belonging to one gender or the other will have consequences in relationships and in the peer group. In the first place, the relationships established by adolescent and adult males are "different with male and female friends, since, although they are capable of maintaining an intimate, deep and emotionally open friendly relationship with women, they do not usually establish this type of friendship with other boys" (Lafuente and Cantero, 2010: 294). Secondly, young men acknowledge having better integration in the peer group and also obtain higher self-esteem scores than girls (Díaz-Aguado *et al.*, 2021). Third, men report experiencing higher

levels of help, security, and solidarity within same-sex relationships (Saferstein, Neimeyer and Hagans, 2005). And finally, males' control of emotions is valued in some peer groups during adolescence, such that an individual may be excluded if his behavior is seen as vulnerable or shows weakness (Heilman, Barker and Harrison: 2017; Ramírez, 2020).

Considering the relationships between emotions, friendship and masculinity, in the mandate of hegemonic or more traditional masculinity, the interpersonal friendships that develop are not very close and, in many cases, the rigidity of masculine norms still prevents some young men from forming friendships with deeper emotional connections (Heilman, Barker and Harrison, 2017).

Methodology

It is common to refer to young people collectively in a way that does not recognize the diversity of discourses and ways of acting. The study presented here attempts to reduce this bias by approaching the observation from different perspectives: on the one hand, from the accounts of young men and, on the other, by investigating the perspective of young women and of professionals who engage or work with young people. From these multifaceted perspectives, a qualitative methodology has been used, employing discussion groups in order to investigate the social perceptions and beliefs of adolescents and young people in relation to the various models of masculinity and to explore what can make young men resistant to moving toward greater sexual equality. The choice of the focus group, as opposed to other qualitative techniques, lies in the advantages it offers for researching the proposed topic: (a) it is more appropriate for exploring the more collective and social facet of young people's experiences in relation to emotions and masculinities; (b) it is a very powerful tool for obtaining social or collective discourses on a topic; (c) and, furthermore, it is a particularly useful technique for addressing social phenomena that are subject to significant changes in society (Del Val and Gutiérrez, 2005), as is the case with masculinities.

Regarding the sample design of the groups, in order to gather a variety of discourses we established the following variables when forming the groups: age, gender, and being or not being a university student,² with greater emphasis on the participation of males, as this was the focus of our research. The combination of these variables led to five focus groups of young people: three with men (GD1, GD3 and GD4), one mixed (GD5) and one with women (GD6). A total of 30 young people between the ages of 16 and 23 participated in the groups and they were recruited through institutional contacts of the research team. The following table presents the composition and characteristics of these groups.

2 All the young people participating in the groups were students at different educational levels. In relation to this variable, we wanted to differentiate the groups according to whether they were university students or at lower levels. In principle, we consider that access to higher education may condition the discourses on masculinities.

Table 1 Basic descriptors of focus groups with young people

Code	Gender	Characteristics	Number of participants
GD1	Men	University students between 18 and 23 years old	7
GD3	Men	Young people between 16 and 17 years old (non-university students)	6
GD4	Men	Non-university students between 18 and 23 years old	6
GD5	Mixed	Young people between 16 and 17 years old (non-university students)	5 (2 girls and 3 boys)
GD6	Women	University students between 18 and 23 years old	6

In addition, a group of experts or professionals (Gordo and Serrano, 2008) was carried out (GD2). This group was made up of six professionals, men and women, working with young people: secondary education, local government youth workers, social educators and social workers from associations working with young people in situations of social exclusion.

The focus groups were conducted in the Social-Lab space of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of València, between 2019 and 2021. Members of the research team were in charge of moderating them. The moderator encouraged discussion and kept the debate focused on the theme of the research, steering the conversation toward the topics of interest. The content to be discussed in the groups had been prepared in advance with the topics and open-ended questions to be asked. Two scripts were prepared: one for the group of professionals³ and the other for the groups of young people.⁴ All the groups were recorded as both audio and video with the permission of the participants and they lasted on average from one and a half to two hours. The audio recordings of the groups were transcribed in their entirety.

This research was carried out, in the first place, by means of a descriptive thematic analysis, in which the narratives surrounding the different topics addressed in the groups were identified and described. And secondly, an interpretative analysis was undertaken, which is essential in qualitative analysis in order to understand the phenomenon, and which consists of reconstructing the meaning of the discourse in its context (Alonso, 2003). In this way, attention was paid to the social context and the meaning that group members give to their accounts (Del Val and Gutiérrez, 2005). The analysis involved describing and understanding young men's accounts of the expression of emotions in order to identify the diverse narratives surrounding masculinity.

Of the total number of categories of analysis in the study, we have used the following five for this particular article: friendship relations between boys and

3 This script covered the following topics: changes in young people's attitudes and behaviors, relationships between boys and girls, leisure, friendships, social networks, sexuality, family role models, gender and equality, sexual and gender diversity.

4 The following themes were used to structure this script: leisure practices, the Internet, social networks and video games, friendships, family, identity role models, affectivity, sexuality, and violence.

girls, peer group pressure, friendship between boys from the feminine point of view, expression of emotions and feelings in boys, and strategies for dealing with difficulties in expressing feelings. Some of these categories were already established in the research design, while others were generated during the analytical procedure of the focus groups. These categories are grouped around the two dimensions that structure the results of the qualitative analysis and which we present below: friendship, and the expression of emotions and feelings; and in this last dimension, how they develop in friendship relationships has also been analysed.

Results

The friendship dimension

Friendship relations between boys and girls

Today there is a greater variety of friendship relationships between young people than before, according to professionals:

There are boys and girls who have very strong friendships from a very young age, who are very loyal, and who feel secure in their peer group, and then there are other boys and other girls, with different profiles, who don't quite understand the friendship relationships between themselves: between boy-girl, boy-boy, girl-girl [...] I think there is diversity. [...] When the groups are mixed, maybe their best friend is a girl, not a boy. [GD2]

In this sense, the participants in the groups do not show a preference for friends of the same sex. They state that they have both male and female friends and qualify that first and foremost they are people. In some cases, they even have a more trusting relationship with girls: "I have much more intimate relationships with girls than with boys" [GD3].

However, it is also noted that the relationship with a female friend differs from that with a male friend. This view is supported by the type of trust they feel toward them. With girls, a relationship is established that allows them to express their feelings and emotions, which are considerably obstructed by the dominant pattern of masculinity, as we will see below. With the boys, they share experiences that they value as forbidden in their relationship with the girls, and this is how they describe it: "I would tell a girl that I might like such and such... another person... but I can't tell a guy. [...]. You jerk off and tell your buddy... but not a girl..." [GD4]

They also highlight differences in the verbal and nonverbal language they use when addressing male or female friends. They feel that they are "rougher" [GD5] when their interlocutor is male or when they are among boys; while when it is a woman, or when they are among girls, they are "gentler" [GD5]. As we can see, gender roles and stereotypes are very marked.

Importance of the peer group and peer pressure

It is widely recognized that the peer group is one of the main spaces for socialization in youth (Hartup, 1989; Brown, 1990; Berndt, 1992). A constant in the discourses of the groups, either explicitly or tacitly, is the strength that the peer group has, especially for the younger teenagers, since it seems to lose power as they grow older and more mature. Having a group of friends, feeling part of one, provides security and its importance grows as the mother and father lose influence and may even be relegated to second place. Although the family continues to be important, social validation within the peer group is fundamental at this vital moment: "There are many people who also do it to show off in front of their friends" [GD2].

In adolescence, the peer group guides our way of acting, thinking, feeling; its influence is so strong that even when we disagree with it, the group identity prevails and we let ourselves be guided by what is well regarded by the group, by group desirability.

This is precisely the framework in which the boys' discourse situates behaviors as abominable for society and as degrading for the victims as the phenomenon of *las manadas* (wolf packs),⁵ the sexual aggression toward and abuse of a girl committed by a group of young men. They express it in these terms:

Since there are so many of us, the responsibility is dissipated among all of us, so you say: yes, it's wrong, but we are all doing it, and you feel less responsibility than if you were alone. [GD3]

The young participants express a firm rejection of these acts. However, trying to dig deeper into the reason that leads them to such behaviors, they add that, if you show opposition to these disgusting acts, or to others that are less atrocious, you may feel excluded from the group.

"To what extent then does the group of friends have an influence? Well, until you reach a limit, of course, but maybe that means you end up without friends, [...] and it's not so easy, to go and look for a group of friends. [GD3]

Friendship between boys from a female point of view

The ways that the girls interpreted male behavior and the influence of the peer group on boys are very revealing. Numerous male gender stereotypes emerge in the group of young university girls. They claim, for example, that boys their age, in order to be more manly, often comment among themselves about the physical traits of the girls they look at.

5 Starting with a well-known case of gang rape in the city of Pamplona (Spain) during the San Fermín festival in July 2016, in which the aggressors called themselves "la manada", the following cases of gang rape (especially of minors) were dubbed "las manadas" in the media.

They say: “Wow, what an ass she has” [...]. The one who says those things the most is the most macho, and I’ve seen that, in many different friends. That’s all like that, always. [GD6]

They also point out that, although gender roles are changing, the archetype of the strong male is still deeply rooted: “They cannot show that they have any weakness [...] it’s inside them”. [GD6]

The participants in the discussion group agree on the importance of the group of friends among boys and underline a series of traits that deserve special attention. Firstly, they emphasize that their young friends put the quantity of friends before the quality of friendship, that they seek to belong to a large group in order to feel protected. Secondly, and closely linked to this, they fear being left without friends or feeling displaced, and that, they emphasize “doesn’t happen with girls [...], it doesn’t usually happen” [GD6]. The boys will even tolerate insults when their behavior deviates from what the group establishes as typical of boys: “I have a friend who has been called a faggot many times, but then he keeps hanging out with them for fear of being alone” [GD6].

Third, they point out that, if there is any leadership in their groups of male and female friends, the leader has a male name and they note that in groups formed by boys only there is a stronger hierarchy, while in groups formed by girls only, internal (intra-group) relations are more horizontal: “Maybe he picks on someone [...] and if he does something bad, he incites the rest to do the same” [GD6].

The girls’ discourse also reveals the existence among men of a submission to the group they belong to, a concession the boys make to avoid the humiliation that their group inflicts on them in the face of the threat of being alone. Thus, these boys, victims of mockery and harassment, do not leave the group:

They remain in it like a joker, and they are knocked down, but they keep following them, because they have no choice, because they want to have friends, [they] long to belong to the group [...]. And that, they emphasize, doesn’t happen with girls [...], it doesn’t usually happen. [GD6]

Boys don’t cry? The expression of emotions and feelings

Currently, young men show transitional discourses: they fight the bondage of traditional masculinity, but they seem to find themselves on insecure, slippery ground. In this sense, part of the discussions revolved around the behavior of crying in public, in response to which the young men said: “I’m tougher [...], there are people who say ‘no, I cry in secret so people don’t see me’ ” [GD3].

Not being able to freely express their feelings can lead to superficial conversations based on trivial aspects of life, according to the observations made by the group of girls:

The conversations [from guys] that I hear... are usually superficial and then when you talk to them you say "How are you doing?" and they say "Fine". It's harder for them... [GD6]

However, there are difficult life situations that can unleash unacknowledged emotions, as in the case of the most vulnerable group of children who argue that it is better to cry: "In the [reception] center [for unaccompanied immigrant children], I see more boys crying than girls... they miss their families" [GD3].

According to what was detected in the accounts, talking about feelings continues to present important obstacles in young men: "I can't talk to my friends about feelings because they either call me a faggot or call me gay or something like that" [GD1], as a result of the different socialization of women and men. The education received, as well as the social environment, are key to understanding the different ways feelings are expressed by men and women:

How they have been raised... It's a cultural issue, it's not biology... Generally, men are treated in one way and women in another... We haven't been taught that aspect of "don't cry", but they have. [GD6]

Profiles of boys in terms of the expression of emotions in friendship relationships

A variety of profiles of boys are observed in relation to the expression of emotions, ranging from those who feel self-sufficient, claim psychological strength, and flee from emotional weakness, through those who limit the expression of their emotions, to those who yearn to share their feelings and get angry at not being able to do so.

Indeed, some boys define themselves as "closed" when it comes to feelings, they try to block showing their feelings to others or even do not see it as necessary: "I have always been a little bit closed when it comes to feelings..." [GD1]; "I cry by myself so that people don't see me" [GD3]. For these boys, showing their feelings towards their friends makes them vulnerable and they understand that it is a sign of weakness: "The downside of sincerity is that you become vulnerable [...]. Showing our feelings will make you vulnerable in front of others..." [GD4]; "Don't be a wimp. They said it more as a joke, but they put it out there..." [GD1]. In addition, they point out that they can deal with life's adversities alone. They explain it like this:

I've always said: if I'm mentally strong, it doesn't matter who comes at me [...]. I have never needed the help of a psychologist. For example, my parents separated and I didn't need to go to a psychologist... [...]. You become strong yourself without counting on anyone. Recently I was with a girl, I'd been with her for four years; the relationship ended... it's over, it's over, there's no problem. [GD4]

On the other hand, we find other young people who externalize their feelings more, who are able to share the interpretation of their emotions but with few friends:

Crying in front of a friend, I could tell you that I can do that with a friend and that's it [...]. In my group of friends [...] there are five or six of us, so there is one who tells him everything, [...], I don't see it as necessary for the others. [GD5]

They are more careful or, in any case, they trust or would trust a specific person, as the following participant relate:

[I could share] 30% [...], in the sense of freeing myself, of releasing the desire to express what I feel, I would tell a partner, a relative, a close person [...], but to express the other percentage I would run to the mirror, you know, to look at myself and be able to solve it. [GD5]

Finally, some boys recognize this limitation linked to the male gender and would like to be able to share their feelings and emotions with more people, and they even show anger about this: "I've thought, 'Damn, why can't I speak openly?'" [GD4] Even so, in these cases it is possible to detect how they manage to maintain friendships with a deeper emotional connection:

With the friends I hang out with, I can talk about my feelings or emotions, what's going on with you, or that you had a ruckus with someone in class, or about your daily life. [GD1]

In spite of everything, they also notice a progressive tolerance among boys for talking about emotional issues, and those who have arrived from another country point out the difference between their society of origin and Spanish society, which they perceive as much more open in this sense.

Mechanisms or strategies for coping with difficulties in expressing feelings

The idea of showing emotions to another male is still tainted by the idea that the expression of feelings feminizes and produces rejection. Difficulties in expressing emotions and feelings in boys can have detrimental consequences for their personal or emotional well-being. Faced with this situation, boys can deploy some therapeutic strategies to minimize these negative effects. It is true that the situation is slowly opening up, that there are young people who are no longer afraid to talk about how they feel and who are more indifferent to disapproval. However, there is one form of behavior that they systematically state in the groups and that is one of the strategies used: they prefer to talk to girls about these issues.

I think [boys] crave emotional value, because they look for it in us... Sometimes they turn to girls to "I'm going to tell you about the problem because with you I can express myself", they want to have that bond, but they are also afraid to look for it in boys because they both have that barrier of not expressing themselves, the feelings... [GD6]

In the group in which both sexes participated, a young woman pointed out that boys do not express their feelings openly, but channel them through several mechanisms: “I don’t see them seeking to express their feelings, but to drown them out through sports, music, whatever.” [GD5]

Physical exercise, especially the gym, represents a therapeutic strategy, an antidote against psychological discomfort or lack of affectivity, as a way to relieve feelings: “I say, ‘damn, today I’m down because no one is giving me affection...’ you go to the gym, you go for a while and it goes away, do I want affection? so I lift five weights.” [GD4]

Discussion and conclusions

One of the conclusions that emerges from the results of the research is that a progressive willingness is detected among boys to talk about emotional issues, although it is not possible to determine a single pattern of action (de Boise and Hearn, 2017). However, the option of sharing feelings with another male still elicits rejection and continues to present significant obstacles. Therefore, in the face of these difficulties and barriers, girls or female friends constitute the affective point of reference among young men, since with them they can express their feelings and open up to their emotional universe. Thus, as has been detected in other studies (Suberviola, 2020), the differences in gender socialization related to emotions and in the performance of emotional roles are clearly seen in the accounts of young men and women.

Another finding in the study that should be highlighted is the identification of different profiles of boys in terms of the expression of emotions, which would correspond to three different models of masculinity and which would also be linked to varying degrees of emotional connection in relationships with friends: from more superficial to deeper ones. (1) *Hegemonic masculinity*: This is represented by those who try to repress the manifestation of feelings in front of others, so as not to show weakness and vulnerability — both associated with the feminine universe —, they feel emotionally or psychologically self-sufficient, claim psychological strength, becoming a sort of “lone ranger”. These young people tend to engage in more superficial friendships, with little emotional connection. (2) *Masculinity in transition*: These are the young men who externalize their feelings more, but control them very carefully or share them with very few people, thus establishing emotional intimacy with few friends. This coincides with some recent studies in which it was detected how men described their desire to openly show their emotions, although it was difficult for them because of the fear of sharing their vulnerability with other people (McQueen, 2017). (3) *(Almost-)inclusive masculinity*: These are young men who are aware of the emotional barrier associated with the male gender and who would like to share more their subjective experience. In these cases, they manage form friendships with a deeper emotional connection. However, these last two models of masculinity detected in the Valencian context are closely aligned with the concept of hybrid masculinities: young men who have more

emotional and sensitive styles of masculinity, but which are in fact new forms of hegemonic masculinity, which may not involve any substantial changes in gender power relations (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014). In this sense, a recent study shows how a significant number of young men in Valencia are situated somewhere between traditional masculinity and more egalitarian masculinities, even though men are increasingly recognizing the necessity of learning to show their vulnerability and affectivity (Kuric *et al.*, 2022).

It should be added that hegemonic masculinity, and specifically difficulties in expressing emotions and feelings, can be detrimental for the personal and emotional well-being of men. Some young men express anguish and mobilize emotions through anger to demonstrate masculinity, with abusive practices and violence towards other men and women (River and Flood, 2021; de Boise and Hearn, 2017). This emotional deficits in men are not only linked to gender violence (Verdú and Mañas-Viejo, 2017), but also the mandates of hegemonic masculinity impact subjectivity and are associated with unhealthy behaviors (Cerdán-Torregrosa, La Parra-Casado and Vives-Cases, 2022), risky practices (Serra, 2020), as well as physical and psychological disorders (Way, 2011). What is more, a relationship has been found between the demands of the traditional masculine role and depression (López-Ruiz and Presmanes-Roqueñi, 2018), while a recent study revealed how suicide could also become an alternative form of demonstration of hegemonic masculinity (River and Flood, 2021).

It is also important to highlight some results related to friendships. First, although they do not show a preference for friends of the same sex, the type of relationship established by boys differs according to whether it is with a male or female friend. With girls they establish a relationship that allows them to express their emotions and feelings, which is not the case with other boys. Everything indicates that the bonds of friendship among men are based more on sociability and among women are based more on intimacy, a differential trait that has been confirmed by sociology for decades (Requena, 1994) and which does not seem to have substantially altered. Secondly, the strong pressure and importance of the peer group in young men is indisputable and translates into the overriding need to be accepted by the group, so that they must act in accordance with pre-established rules. This fear of rejection or exclusion from the group if they do not act in accordance with the social formulas considered “natural,” means that affectivity among young men is repressed. In any case, “the social judgment of the other men can put a lot of pressure on them, because it can allow them to be part of the group or to be excluded and socially ostracized” (Rodríguez-del-Pino and Jabbaz, 2022: 122).

Finally, a comparison of the different groups of young people shows that there are no significant differences in age and attending or not attending higher education, in contrast to what we had originally expected. The study by Kuric *et al.* (2022) is also along the same lines as this finding and, in addition, points out how the variables social class and religiosity are indeed determinants of young men’s more traditional positions with respect to masculinity (high and upper-middle social class and high religious sentiment). Similarly, Roberts’s

study on young working-class men and masculinities (2018), highlights positive changes in the representation of masculinity among this group of working-class men without higher education, finding that they have adopted a more inclusive masculinity and a higher capacity for emotional intimacy.

This study has some limitations. First of all, in relation to age, it would be appropriate to extend the interval, both at the lower and upper limits, in order to examine whether the differences between boys and girls in emotional capacities are moderately observed at early ages and become more accentuated with the passage of time, due to gender socialization (Suberviola, 2020), making it more difficult for boys to express their feelings with words (Bonino, 2000). Secondly, the consideration of other variables of interest for this study, such as sexual orientation or the immigrant background/ethnicity of the young men, would perhaps make it possible to obtain a greater discursive variety or, at least, a greater complexity in the shaping of discourses around the new masculinities. Thirdly, since this is a qualitative study, the results cannot be generalized to the entire study population. However, our research has produced a finding regarding the three models of masculinity identified in relation to the expression of emotions that would be interesting to verify through a more extensive quantitative study. Finally, given the advance of the far right globally and especially in the European context, there is a need for further research on how these discourses are penetrating young men and the construction of their masculinities.

Funding

This work was supported by the Regional Government of Valencia [Generalitat Valenciana] under Grant number GVA/173/2019.

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Data de receção: 16/01/2024 Data de aprovação: 27/05/2024