

Masculinity as a mask: class, gender and sexuality in youth masculinities

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Abstract: The study of masculinities holds a prominent place in Feminist and Gender Studies nowadays. This paper presents an analysis based on in-depth personal interviews from three case studies in Compulsory Secondary Education, with the aim of analyzing adolescent masculinities (12-18 years of age) in a city in southern Spain and their representation of sexuality, understood as a “mask” that is constructed through gender socialization and subjectivation processes to later on identify the class and gender marks that define these two processes. The results reveal a conflict between the dominant social norm regarding sexuality, internalized through gender socialization, and resistance to such norm, activating gender subjectivation. The resolution of this conflict describes the process of construction of the mask that adolescent masculinity is, in which the marks of social class become evident as well.

Key words: masculinity, youth, sexuality, gender, social class.

Resumen: El estudio de las masculinidades ocupa un lugar destacado en los estudios feministas y de género actualmente. Este artículo presenta un análisis basado en entrevistas personales en profundidad, procedentes de tres estudios de caso en educación secundaria obligatoria, con el objetivo de analizar las masculinidades adolescentes (12-18 años) en una ciudad del sur de España y su representación de la sexualidad, entendida como “máscara” que se construye a través de los procesos de socialización y subjetivación de género, para identificar las marcas de clase y género que definen esos procesos. Los resultados revelan un conflicto entre la norma social dominante sobre sexualidad, internalizada a través de la socialización de género, y la resistencia a esa norma, que activa la subjetivación de género. La resolución de ese conflicto describe el proceso de construcción de la máscara que es la masculinidad adolescente, en donde están presentes también las marcas de clase.

Palabras clave: masculinidad, adolescencia, sexualidad, género, clase social.

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Introduction

In social studies, the first approach to women (singular) as an object of research lacked the feminist approach that was later adopted. Later, feminist theory came to consider women (in plural), in order to make their heterogeneity visible. Subsequently, gender studies introduced gender relations as a unit of analysis, understanding that the inequality and oppression historically suffered by women can only be understood within the framework of relations between women and men (Narotzky, 1995; Moore, 1999). Thus,

The importance of masculinity studies lies in their ability to analyze the practices and representations of males from their gender specificities, such practices being part of social relations that place men mostly in a position of domination (Gómez *et al.*, 2016: 156).

From such a gendered approach, this article focuses on a phenomenon of interest in the study of masculinity and sexuality in adolescence, which Haste (2013: 525) aptly delimits:

by focusing on boys' problem behavior, there is a risk of missing opportunities for constructive discussions about sex and overlooking the fact that even noisy, disruptive students have a wealth of questions, values, and concerns simmering "just below the surface."

Masculinity is thus a mask. Hence the need to observe what lies just beneath that surface, to the analysis of which this article is dedicated. To this end, the theory of the social construction of the masculine –subject, in this case– will be followed through the processes of socialization and subjectivation¹ –sexual, in this case–, attending to two principles of social structuring of special relevance such as social class and gender.

Two initial considerations delimit the generated space of adolescent masculinities that are the object of analysis in this article: on the one hand, the privileged socio-structural position of masculinities; and on the other, that this surface of privilege is a mask under which underlie the conflict and contradiction implied by gender social norms. In most of the available studies, the construction of masculinities is understood as a process of learning the social norm of gender (Harris, 1995), where representations about sexuality can be considered a construct resulting from "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 1987); that is, a mask that hides what lies "just below the surface", as Haste indicates paraphrasing Blake (2004: 281, cited in Haste, 2013: 523).

1 For a detailed understanding of this theory and its theoretical and epistemological referents in the field of social sciences, see Venegas (2017).

This proposal constitutes the central thesis of this article. Thus, based on these considerations, the objective is to analyze precisely what lies behind the mask, adolescent masculinities, in the plural, since they are dynamic, multiple, changing and diverse. To this end, the article focuses on the analysis of the representation that is made of sexuality, attending to its social context of reference (social class), in order to know the processes of socialization and subjectivation (Venegas, 2017) that underlie the construction of that mask that is masculinity and that in this study takes shape in the vital stage of adolescence (12-18 years).

The analysis of masculinity as a “mask” is of particular importance for social science research today, particularly within the framework of a comprehensive model of affective-sexual education (Ketting & Ivanova, 2018), holistic and democratic, oriented towards the promotion of sexual and gender equality, and thus social justice (Venegas, 2011c). And this is because adolescent masculinity built on a patriarchal model (Willis, 1988 and 2003; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Bourdieu, 2005; Forrest, 2000; Richardson, 2010) is confronted by an inclusive masculinity (Anderson and McCormack, 2018), on which it is necessary to build educational and social policies that bet on sustaining democracy on those pillars of equality and social justice.

Adolescent masculinities in the framework of gender and sexuality studies

This paper defines “gender” as a category of analysis (Esteban, 2001; Maquieira, 2001) and a principle of social structuring (Harding, 1986; Thurén, 1993), as well as a social, historical and cultural construction, not a universal, fixed and immovable essence, since it is argued that practice can continuously remake the social structure (Connell, 1987). Gender contains the two dimensions that make up social reality: material and symbolic (Thurén, 1993; Moore, 1999). It is transversal to the whole society.

Gender social relations are considered to be mediated by power (Connell, 1987; Thurén, 1993; Maquieira, 2001), which is the principle that generates inequality between the various gender categories, giving rise to the structuring of patriarchy as a mode of gender domination. From this derives the importance of kinship in the emergence of gender oppression and its social reproduction (Rubin, 1975; Thurén, 1993; Weeks, 2003). A comprehensive analysis of gender implies its imbrication with other forms of structural inequality –social class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etcetera–; that is, intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Verloo, 2006).

Based on such principles, this article follows the theory of becoming a subject –sexual and gendered–, through the two complementary processes that are socialization and subjectification (which was already developed elsewhere, see: Venegas, 2017), according to which the individual becomes a subject through a mechanism of power that unfolds in a double and simultaneous process: being subject to and being subject of (Butler, 1997). By being subjected to dominant discourses on gender and sexuality, the individual becomes a normalized subject in a dominant social model. As a subject of practices, the individual becomes an agent or subject of social action, an action that is elucidated in the continuous debate between constraint and possibility (Touraine, 2005),

insofar as structurally situated action is a relational action and, therefore, mediated by power, which is both external to the subject and its own jurisdiction.

Thus, action, subject and structure are interconnected in processes of maintenance of social structures, through socialization, and the consequent submission, which leads the subject to adhere to that structural order; but also of challenge to those social structures, through the subjectivation that makes possible resistance, understood as contestation, which activates, through the reflexivity of practice, the possibility of social change (Venegas, 2017: 31-32).

Thus, this theory reflects the interest of gender and sexuality studies in revisiting gender theories in order to incorporate the critical analysis of masculinities in the need to understand masculinities in their complexity, in their production and reproduction, but also in the processes of social change in which men are involved for equality, democracy and social justice. In this line, the work of Harris (1995) on the “messages that men listen to” stands out, these messages being the social norms of gender which, according to him, comprise three types of messages to construct the mask that is masculinity:

- Messages for learning to be a man: the construction of gender identity.
- Messages for acting like a man: gender practices.
- Observation of the differences between men: diversity of gender models, that is, the existence of masculinities, in the plural.

The author concludes that “patriarchy [...] promotes norms that men learn to value in order to promote a social order that benefits a few men, while oppressing many others”² (Harris, 1995: 190). This differentiating principle internal to the category “men” had already been pointed out by Connell (1987). This led to the interest of men’s groups in promoting social change towards effective equality of rights and opportunities between

2 The translation of all the originals in English was done by the writer of this article.

women and men, at both inter- and intra-group levels, giving rise to the attempt to establish a “men’s liberation” movement in the 1970s (Connell, 1997), which coincided with the women’s liberation movement (Second Feminist Wave), sharing its feminist inspiration. However, as Connell (1997) points out, liberation movements are the fruit of the oppression suffered by their members and their struggle to end it. As a social group, men, especially heterosexual men who represent “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell, 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), are not an oppressed group. Only the shared interests of women and men can lead to the struggle for social justice.

Therein rests the relational approach to gender mentioned above. For Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), hegemonic masculinity is a model of practices that allows men’s domination over women to continue. It differs from other masculinities, especially subordinate masculinities. Only a small group of men can exercise it. Men who receive the benefits of patriarchy without propagating a strong version of male domination show a complicit masculinity. Hegemony here means a condition achieved through culture, institutions and persuasion; therefore, gender orders construct multiple masculinities. This diversity of models, which both Harris (1995) and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) explain, serves as a reference in the processes of sexual and gender subjectivation of men, which, as noted above, can activate the resistance of the subjects and thus a potential social change.

In line with these approaches, Bourdieu (2005) analyzes “male domination” in terms of the relationship between virility and violence, which he locates in gender socialization itself, and agrees with Connell (1987 and 1997) and Harris (1995) in explaining that “virility [...] is fundamentally a burden” (Bourdieu, 2005: 68), a mask, and that “virility is an eminently relational concept, constructed before and for other men and against femininity, in a kind of fear of the feminine” (Bourdieu, 2005: 71). Bourdieu (2005) examines masculinity also as “nobility”, observing that there is a public/masculine versus private/feminine opposition by way of permanent dispositions with a Pygmalion effect, so that “it is enough for men to take over tasks considered feminine and perform them outside the private sphere for them to be ennobled and transfigured” (Bourdieu, 2005: 79).

A field of study of masculinities is thus emerging, from a feminist and critical perspective, which seeks to question the prescriptive normativity of gender. It is recognized that the gender norm, which is masculinity, imposes a mask on male subjects causing uneasiness, as does femininity on female subjects, although men are the privileged social category in the structuring of society in terms of gender, recognizing also the diversity of positions

and models internal to this social category “men”. The patriarchal, unequal, hegemonic, dominant model of masculinity is at the center of these analyses. It will not be until recently that we begin to speak of inclusive masculinities (Anderson and McCormack, 2018).

Meanwhile, the study of adolescent masculinities has been developed especially in the field of education (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2012), where this article also takes shape, since:

It is in this field where through subtle methods of persuasion and disciplining bodies are educated in matters of sexuality and affectivity, and the habitus of gender socialization is configured as “a process through which the social order is progressively inscribed in the minds [...] and embodied in our body in the form of bodily hexis” (Rodríguez, 2003, cited in Silva-Segovia *et al.*, 2015: 27).

The first work of reference is the classic work by Willis (1988), an ethnographic study on the construction of working-class adolescent male identities within the framework of cultural studies, through alternative symbolic resources such as clothing, music and leisure. The initial study is updated through what Willis (2003) calls the three great waves of school modernization, where the mask of masculinity is transformed to adapt to the socio-structural context of each wave. The first corresponds to cultural responses to universal schooling in the context of industrial society, through a culture of resistance based on a rugged masculinity that confers power on boys over other less successful boys and over women; a masculinity compensating for the need to feel superior, where manual labor is identified with masculinity. The second wave is characterized by responses to post-industrial society, in a United Kingdom that is beginning to lose manual industrial work, diminishing the possibility of a decent wage for much of the working class and thus opening up a profound crisis of working-class masculinity.

The third wave corresponds to the electronic and consumer (postmodern) culture, which continues to this day.³ Values such as materialism, money, sex, violence or fast food are imposed, eroding human worth and dignity. The meanings produced in consumer culture intersect with other forms of social categorization, producing simultaneous possibilities of constriction and freedom that are expressed bodily through raves, hip-hop, bodybuilding, etc. The resulting masculinity is no longer secured by a proletarian industrial heritage, but continues to be directed against the school, leading to misogyny and homophobia, criminality and violence. This dominant position is, however, a prelude to their subsequent subordination in the labor market.

3 However, Willis' (2003) analysis does not yet include social networks and the digitalization of society.

Working-class adolescent masculinities in post-industrial England are also analyzed by Nayak (2006), who similarly points to the relationship between class, gender, race and sexuality, in an ongoing search for belonging, updating the work of Willis (1988 and 2003) in interpreting the meanings of working-class masculinity, in the construction of everyday meaning and what he calls “youth transitions”.

On the other hand, Richardson (2010) finds in his study that young people identify “sex” (heterosexual) with coitus above all. He defines sexuality as a social process. Adolescent sexual practices are framed within broader social relationships and practices that give them their meaning, with emotional intimacy being the preferred setting for having sex. The main reason for having sex is to be accepted by the peer group, with more pressure on boys than on girls. However, many young people in their study acknowledge that waiting for the right girl is the best option; some even express regret for not waiting, although they acknowledge that “doing it” causes them relief and pride.

Hence the importance of “talking about sexuality” as a form of social interaction that establishes the framework where (hetero)sexual and gender identities are constructed, which are reached collectively and produce hierarchies among boys, turning private sexual experiences into public performances. These are the transition rites to adulthood that are negotiated within the peer culture and that Nayak (2006) also observes in his work.

In line with Willis (1988 and 2003), Richardson (2010) takes up the analysis of working-class masculinities and sexualities to point out that they are constructed in relation, and often in opposition, to other forms of masculinity, as well as femininities, so they have specific characteristics such as a taste for sports, fights and attraction to girls, which derive in a hypermasculinity, as they do not reach the expectations of middle-class masculinities that privilege academic success and non-manual work.

Although Richardson (2010) does not call it as such, underlying his analysis is also the sexual construction of a masculinity that is a mask on whose surface social desirability prevails in the friendship group. In fact, the literature reviewed shows that dominant heterosexual masculinities are characterized by heterosexual practices that are expressions of homophobia and misogyny. In addition, many young men feel that they cannot talk about their lack of pleasure, anxieties, or concerns about sex.

This brings us back, once again, to the need to look “just below the surface” (Haste, 2013), in order to understand well that mask that is masculinity, as “messages” carrying the social gender norm (Harris, 1995).

As observed in most studies, sexist and homophobic attitudes are a strategy to ensure a successful “heterosexual reputation” among adolescents (Forrest, 2000; Willis, 2003) in the face of homosexuals and boys considered non-masculine (Haste, 2013). This also implies being competent and experienced in coital sexual relations (Forrest, 2000; Richardson, 2010), especially based on the perception of the norm through the family and friendship group (Barrera *et al.*, 2004).

Therefore, the studies reviewed show that adolescent male sexuality is defined by the gender markers internalized through the socialization process. The present study analyzes this phenomenon in the case of Spain, where it has hardly been investigated, in order to focus on the construction of masculinity as a mask through the processes of socialization and sexual and gender subjectivation, also considering class membership.

Research objectives and methodology

This article comes from three investigations on the affective-sexual relationships of girls and boys aged 12-18 years in the city of Granada (Andalusia, Spain). These are three case studies (Berg, 2001) carried out in 2006, 2007 and 2014, in the compulsory secondary education cycle. In all of them, informed consent was obtained from the educational centers.

The cases comprise interviews, personal and in-depth (Valles, 1997) to each student of the three class groups (Venegas, 2011a), in order to make adolescent experiences visible through their voices –a central element (Hadfield and Haw, 2001)–, to analyze the construction of their subjectivities (Silva-Segovia *et al.*, 2015). In addition, the gender approach has been adopted (Heiskanen, 2006). The interviews were recorded and transcribed. They used a protocol of questions comprising seven blocks related to the affective-sexual relationships of the participating subjects, as well as to the affective-sexual education received: family, neighborhood, school, couple relationships, affective relationships, gender issues and future expectations (Venegas, 2011b).

The general objective of this article is to analyze adolescent masculinities (12-18 years old) and their representation of sexuality, understood as a “mask” that is constructed through the processes of gender socialization and subjectification (Venegas, 2017), in order to identify the gender markers that define these processes. Therefore, the present analysis is limited to the interviews with the boys in the three cases. In two of these (2006 and 2014), the young people belonged to schools located in two districts considered

by the Granada city council as predominantly working class, given the socioeconomic and educational profile of their population, as well as the value of housing in the two districts or the levels of (un)employment. The third case (2007), in the heart of the city center, is considered by the municipality to be predominantly middle class by the same criteria. This municipal consideration of the districts and, therefore, of the centers has been adopted to situate the class membership of the social environment of the students attending each of the three secondary schools.

The responses of a total of 26 boys were analyzed, whose sociodemographic profiles are shown in Table 1⁴; their names are fictitious to ensure anonymity. Sixty-nine percent of the boys interviewed come from backgrounds considered working class, and 31% middle class; 77% define themselves as Caucasian, 15%, gypsy and 8%, mestizo. As for nationality, 85% are Spanish and only 15% are foreigners (Romania, Russia and Bolivia). All of them declare themselves heterosexual.

Due to the data analyzed –qualitative and localized in three cases–, the present analysis does not intend to reach generalizable conclusions nor representative of the totality of Spanish adolescents in the age range studied, but it does attempt to draw social trends that may be shared, generationally, by boys in the same social situation. Therein lies the interest of this analysis within the framework of the study of adolescent affective-sexual relationships from a critical feminist perspective, as well as for its value for a holistic affective-sexual education.

Analysis of results: representation of sexuality and construction of adolescent masculinities

The results were analyzed from the theory of subject becoming between socialization and subjectivation (Venegas, 2017), within the framework of a holistic, democratic and egalitarian model of adolescent affective-sexual relationships (Barragan, 1999; Sex Education Forum, 2006; Venegas, 2011c; Santos *et al.*, 2012; Haste, 2013; Ketting and Ivanova, 2018). This section will first present the dimensions that represent sexuality in the discourses of the adolescents interviewed. These dimensions will then be analyzed and discussed, understanding masculinity as a normative mask to be inhabited by adolescent boys, as noted above.

4 The table and graphs can be found in the Annex at the end of this article (Editor's note).

Representation of sexuality and class belonging in adolescent masculinities

The analysis of sexuality from a social class approach is a classic in the study of masculinities, especially working-class adolescents (Willis, 1988 and 2003; Nayak, 2006; Richardson, 2010; McCormack, 2014; Venegas, 2018). Graphs 1 and 2 show the dimensions that represent sexuality for the boys interviewed, according to the categorization of the data from the interviews carried out with the help of the Nudist NVivo software. This graphic categorization allows us to quantify the presence of these dimensions, according to social class, which enables us to observe some interesting considerations in a comparative perspective.

For all boys, rites of passage appear as the most relevant dimension in their representation of sexuality, although among adolescents in the school located in the working class neighborhood their presence is almost twice as high as among those in the middle class school (35% and 19%, respectively). This may be due to the higher number of teenage pregnancies in the first case, as well as their earlier entry into the labor market. There is also a considerable difference in the feeling of shame (18% and 6%, respectively), which can be attributed to sociocultural values alluded to in the interviews, such as honor and honor. Finally, an aspect referred to only by the boys of the school located in the working class neighborhood is the one that makes express mention of the social situation of the neighborhood itself, which denotes a strong sense of class belonging:

Many times, you're sitting there and you see, you don't see the emptiness, you see it as normal, many come from work, others pass by with carts full of junk and all that, the vans full of cardboard. I don't know, maybe you go to [name of a shopping center] and you see a blanket and a mattress all dirty, like that, as if a homeless person had lived there or whatever. That, when you see it, it makes an impact on you.... Many times you get up to go to school and you can see, I don't know, children, boys of 20, 23 years old, lying there on a mattress, lying on a mattress, covered with cardboard. Then you go out, and the first thing you do is look at them. And that has an impact on you (Guille).

Some dimensions appear only in the interviews with boys from the middle-class context, such as the fear of unwanted pregnancy, surely because in the working-class context its greater frequency makes it a socially "normalized" phenomenon, as well as the awareness of the role played by family socialization in sexuality, or the reference to the friendship group, which is relevant for boys from the working-class context in aspects of the research that are outside the object of this article. The following is an analysis of the dimensions that represent the sexuality of these adolescents in

their interviews and that give content to the processes of socialization and subjectivation in becoming an adolescent male subject.

Gender and sexuality, identity and practice, in the construction of adolescent masculinities

Gender as a social norm (Harris, 1995) structures the representation of sexuality of the boys interviewed through their gender socialization. Following Harris' (1995) schema, noted above, a first aspect that shows how gender structures this representation is gender identification when talking about sexuality in the family. Boys clearly prefer their fathers: "Always with a man, maybe, since he is of the same sex as you, well... and besides, he [his father] is forty... [...] he has already been through everything you have been through" (Fran⁵). This identification is part of a differential gender socialization from the very moment of birth, which the boys interviewed recognize: "Whenever someone is born, or whenever someone is pregnant, you buy either something blue or something pink" (Guille). Therein lies the origin of gender inequality, which activates the construction of gendered identity and practices, according to the social gender norm. A dominant masculinity is thus constructed which, in the interviews, materializes in a double gender standard in two aspects:

1. The *exercise of power* (Connell, 1987; Harris, 1995; Willis, 1988 and 2003):

I think they should respect men in one way or another.... [...] it is because of my family's way, because my mother is always "I am going to do this" [...] when I was younger, she used to say "I am going to arrive at two o'clock in the morning". Ask your father", since I see my father, that what he says is what is done. If I tell my mother something and she says "come on, yes, or no".... But it's all "ask your father" (Javi).

2. The *practice of sexuality* (Forrest, 2000; Barrera *et al.*, 2004; Richardson, 2010):

If she were a girl, it wouldn't be the same, because if I am a father and I have a boy, and my boy wants to go out and have sex, I say that it would bother me because he is my child, in general, but a boy is not going to get pregnant. But if she were a girl, I don't want my girl to become the town whore. Because it's different, it's because of society, not because I'm sexist, but because society sees it that way (Tony).

The maximum expression of this genericization of affective-sexual practices is, according to the interviews, gender violence:

5 The verbatims collect the literal transcription of the expression of the interviewed subjects.

That girl is going to end up... crazy in the head. The boyfriend treats her like shit. [...] Everybody tells her: "you're an asshole out of your mind". Even her friends and everyone. [...] He treats her like shit. [...] That girl is going to end up in pieces. They're going to kill her (Luis).

The result is the construction of a mask masculinity, which, simultaneously confers the power already noted, constrains boys, preventing them from being able to acknowledge their doubts and lack of knowledge, for fear that their virility will be questioned (Sex Education Forum, 2006; Richardson, 2010; Haste, 2013):

Many people have doubts and do not go to the hospital to ask. [...] maybe someone doesn't know how to put on a condom and so as not to go and ask someone, or not to go and ask them, correctly, they keep quiet and remain in doubt. And that happens because... maybe there are some who go like this "I don't know what", but then you ask "and hey, you, I don't know what", and it's not to be smarty, it's to see if he really knows and maybe he says: "yes, it was like that", and you say "no" (Fran).

Speech itself, as a practice that conveys identity and allows communication, is a reflection of this generated mask that opts for rude terms and expressions (Willis, 1988; Harris, 1995; Forrest, 2000) as a sign of virility (Bourdieu, 2005):

If all the people go their own way, they go their own way, for example, they tell you something "silly, I don't know what, I don't know exactly", "shut up, next time I'll go", "have you heard this one", "bah, fuck him".... And so on (Mario).

This mask internalized through socialization orients practices of accommodation to the gender norm among the boys interviewed, but also of resistance, activating a process of subjectivation that defines the male "becoming a subject" (Venegas, 2017) in the conflict between adherence to that norm and breaking with it, in the search to negotiate the terms in which they are constructing their own masculinity, in "transition" towards adulthood (Nayak, 2006). Hence, they are both beneficiaries of patriarchy and critical of the sexism it generates:

I know that there are many in the class who are very macho, but very macho. And I've even heard barbarities like "girls who have boyfriends don't have to go out in the street", and the whole class would stand around.... [...] and the girls shouting "oh, don't go out, stuff like that" (Alberto).

Initiation into the practice of coitus –the myth of the first time– is the sexual practice that occupies the central space in interviews when "talking about sexuality" (Richardson, 2010). The average age of first coital intercourse in Europe is 15 years old (Ketting and Ivanova, 2018). This is a practice influenced by peer pressure (Barrera *et al.*, 2004; Richardson,

2010) at young ages (Baumer and South, 2001, cited in Barrera *et al.*, 2004). However, interviews reveal discomfort derived from this pressure on boys (Forrest, 2000; Haste, 2013). Dominant masculinity, expert in sexuality and always ready for sexual practice, is a mask that underlies “just below the surface” (Blake, 2004: 281, cited in Haste, 2013: 523) of sexual leadership and pleasure, derived from the “messages men hear” (Harris, 1995) about sexuality:

We tried to do it once with my girlfriend and we didn't succeed. [...] A boy says: “let's do it”, “let's do it”, he's always ready. [...] Maybe you say it to a girl and I know that... I have told her many times: “I know you have to think about it, I'm not rushing you”. [...] And once she left me because of that. [...] There was another day I tried with my girlfriend, well, I didn't try, it happened like this... and I didn't have a condom or anything, and I said no, and I fucked, and I was on the verge, because the other time we tried and it didn't go in [...]. Because she told me [...] we were lying down and she told me: “I have to tell you something”. I turned around, and I thought “what is she going to say to me”. And says: I want it to be with you, do you love me? at first I didn't get it, and then suddenly she says: “yes, I want to be with you”. And immediately I had a flash like that, and I said, “I don't know what”. I had dreamed about it many times, but I never thought [...] that she was going to tell me that day. And then she picked it up and told me: “I want it to be with you”. And I stayed like that... And I said: “Are you sure? And she says: “yes”. And I said: “are you sure?”, “yes, yes, yes”. And we tried, and nothing happened. Then, just the day we didn't try, I had her almost inside, you know? [...] I told her no. Well, I didn't say no, I withdrew her [...] I did like this... and I said: “no, no, wait”. So it was a no-brainer, and being the first time for her, neither... [...] I'm not very convinced to do it with her either... (Fran).

Sexual desire and romantic love in adolescence confuse, constructing the myth of the first time, which generates doubts among the boys interviewed. The above quote exemplifies the conflict between norms internalized in the sexual socialization generated and the values of resistance to that model of dominant masculinity that activates the becoming agent subject, subject of action, through a subjectivation (Venegas, 2017) by which the boy is positioning himself, making decisions and approaching his own model of masculinity, where identity and practices complement each other in the representation and experience of sexuality that leads to adulthood, as analyzed in the following section.

Sexuality as transition: rites of passage

Sexuality marks several rites of passage, especially in adolescence (Richardson, 2010), which describe a process of construction and search for belonging in line with what Nayak (2006) calls “youth transitions”.

First, the transition from childhood to adolescence, through puberty and the awakening of sexual desire, which is mixed and complicated with falling in love in adolescent affective-sexual relationships:

I used to like games a lot. I remember that I used to go with my friends to play soccer. Suddenly, you get a girlfriend, and you don't think about the play, you think about your girlfriend [...]. You start to feel some of these really bad feelings that you haven't felt [...] because if you are in love, it's a different thing from not being in love [...] When you get older, you need more money, you realize that you can't spend all day with the PlayStation or playing soccer, you have to make a living, earn that money, buy clothes, maybe a house, work [...] (Rubén).

The second rite of passage, already contained in the previous moment, involves the definitive transition from adolescence to adulthood, the stabilization of a couple, parenthood and the assumption of responsibilities:

I don't want to have a child until I have gray hair. [...] I will have a child when I know that I will be with him every day. [...] when I am able to give him a piece of bread and when I can give him a roof over his head and when I have my life stable, and as long as we want, I don't know, I think that at some point I could be a good father, but I don't know either, there are many who fail in the attempt (Luis).

Fatherhood replaces sexual desire as the milestone of these transitions and culminates in adult masculinity⁶. Related to this, it is worth mentioning teenage pregnancy, a prominent fear for middle-class boys, as the above verbatim, by Luis, shows, but a rite of passage for working-class boys:

They are not married, that's what I tell her husband because when she gets pregnant, he is her husband [...]. It seems that there is a virus or something, that all the young women have gotten pregnant [...]. They are all a year or two older than me [...] They think it's rarer for them to be virgins when they get married than for them to get pregnant (Raúl).

In any case, it is always the subject of power negotiation in the adolescent couple, as shown by several studies (Holland *et al.*, 1990; Santos *et al.*, 2012), according to which adequate contraceptive measures are not always taken,

6 The study of changing models of fatherhood (Barbeta-Viñas and Cano, 2017) would be an example of the broader study of masculinities. Fatherhood exemplifies and concretizes masculinity. The transition in fatherhood toward a more egalitarian parenting model signifies a shift toward a more egalitarian masculinity.

even when they are known. The rejection, especially of condoms, is due to the fact that they break the spontaneity and fluidity of coitus, according to the subjects:

I'm scared to death that my girlfriend will get pregnant. I'm very afraid of that and all the time I'm scared and my girlfriend isn't afraid or anything, like other girlfriends. [...] Before, yes, we used to use it [condoms]. But not anymore [...] I already know everything [about contraceptives], but I don't know, it's just that... because I'm not going inside and I think I'm going to have a good time... but I'm always very shitty (Tony).

Shame and dignity: sexuality as something dirty

As the results show, adolescent sexuality is defined by norms that generate continuous conflicts in these boys between desire and taboo, freedom and constriction. An example of this is the feeling of shame that underlies several aspects referred to in the interviews. For some of the boys, this shame is the result of identifying sexuality with taboo, which defines the sexual socialization that constructs their masculinities according to greater, lesser or no resistance to the norms of this socialization:

when we were watching a program on TV that talks about sex. Well, you have to pay attention, right?⁷ And my father said: "You don't say that, you keep that to yourself, and things like that". My mother said: "Well, if you know it, who cares if you say it, that's good, that you know these things, so that when you arrive in the future, you know what to do". [...] My father would go through the roof. He would start shouting, "Boy, you're dirty. Those things are for you, don't say it". He gave me such a hard time (Guillermo).

Hence a second dimension of shame: opting for the use of euphemisms instead of calling the various aspects of sexuality by name: "He put his hand on the forbidden parts of the girls [...] I say 'if he let me touch this, he will let me touch other things'" (Raúl).

Finally, the results reveal a type of shame connoted by the value of honor as an ideal for certain ethnic groups, for example, the gypsy population: "I don't love her, maybe I have taken away her dignity and I don't reciprocate, do you understand me? That's why I feel dirty" (Raúl). All these dimensions of shame exert a function of social control (Harre and Parrott, 1996, cited in Forrest, 2000), through sexuality as an institution of social regulation (Weeks, 2003), which is central to the construction of masculine identities and practices in adolescence.

7 Refers to the affective-sexual education course conducted with each of the three groups in the three studies, prior to the in-depth personal interviews.

The friendship group

The friendship group is the most significant social agency in adolescence, essential for the discovery, living and experience of sexuality (Forrest, 2000; Barrera *et al.*, 2004; Richardson, 2010; Haste, 2013; Venegas, 2018). In the interviewees analyzed, it is alluded to by middle-class boys but not by working-class boys, who do allude to it in reference to other aspects not addressed in this article. An outstanding experience is the discovery of sexuality through the first sexual practices in a group:

To discover sexuality, that is, to start masturbating and all that, I don't remember, I was twelve, or eleven. I think I went to my neighbor's house and he said to me: "I'm going to show you something", and he showed me a porn video and said to me: "Come on, let's jerk off". And I said, A handjob? What is that? I didn't know what a handjob was. "Wow, that's like this, like this". Because my neighbor didn't know either and I said: "ah". The two of us, we started to do it like this, and like that... (Alberto).

"Talking about sexuality" with friends becomes a central practice in the friendship group (also in Haste, 2013), occupying a good part of their conversations as opposed to the difficulty they find for it in other social agencies, where it is almost taboo, according to the perception of the boys interviewed:

It's a topic of conversation among the kids nowadays, "oh, you go to this porn site, and so on". Well, I have to get more into the environment, but in my house there is very little talk about sex, not that it is a taboo, but there is very little talk about it (Antonio).

Age plays a fundamental role. Seniority is synonymous with experience, confers status and determines the position in the power hierarchy of the friendship group (Richardson, 2010). The group "educates" for sexuality:

We have a lot of confidence, we are a group. We, the younger ones, get together with the older ones, and the older ones with the older ones. [...] From 10 to the oldest, who may be 60. The one who knows it is the one who talks the most, and the rest of us listen (Rubén).

Talking about sexuality with friends is also a source of fun and a subject of jokes, but boys are aware of social norms about sexuality, so they question practices that go beyond the boundaries of those norms:

There are some people who are already out of control. [...] They start talking and they start telling you that they've gone whoring, that they're not going to do that again... [...] And of getting both of them in the same room... I've seen it on the video, recorded. [...] They are the most fucked-up guys in the world, you know what I mean? They are kids who tell you things they have done at that age and you say: "Holy shit, but what are you going for, you are going for mentally depraved people". [...] When they get

money, they get money and go whoring. [...] They catch the girls and have threesomes with them and everything, and the girls let themselves go, and they tell about it and it's so funny (Luis).

These discourses reveal a socialization in a model of hegemonic masculinity, where sexual practice, mainly coital, and also the consumption of pornography and prostitution are placed at the center of the construction of their being heterosexual, sexually active men. This gives them their position in the hierarchy of power in the friendship group, while revealing a subjectivation by which adolescents also resist this hegemonic masculinity, questioning sexual practices that exceed the limits of the generalized sexual norm.

Misogyny and homophobia

As the studies reviewed (Willis, 1988 and 2003; Forrest, 2000) point out, misogyny and homophobia are two commonplaces in hegemonic masculinities in adolescence. A frequent example of misogyny resides in the double standard with which they view the sexual practices of girls who enjoy their sexuality, as many of them do:

Some girls are a bit slutty, they might arrive one day and read with one, and the next day with another, and the next day with another (Sergio).

Sexual diversity constitutes the greatest controversy in the interviews conducted, where there are abundant examples of subtle discrimination:

A lot of people here at school who say, "no, not with gays," and the first insult that comes to their mouth is faggot. And you think, "Well, you're already prejudiced by saying that. If you talk so much, that you..." And people who, well, I can't even listen to them, who say: "I couldn't have a gay friend". And you say "but why?". "No, let's go and let him grope me". And it seems as if all gays are out. And they are people like us (Alberto).

A more detailed analysis of the interviews shows, however, a more explicit rejection of non-heterosexual identities and practices, which seem to be relatively accepted when they occur in the subjects' private sphere, but not if flaunted in public:

In my group, well, yes, there is a gay guy, and they bully him, but I don't know. It's not that he's gay, he's a crazy faggot, he's one of those who thinks he's a woman, it's not that he thinks he's a woman, it's just that it's a very strange thing, like if you're gay, and you say you're gay, hell, they'll respect you. If you go around shouting and with the girls and everything, I say: "Where is this going?" (Tony).

The interviews reveal that the origin of this homophobia is often its own socialization in the family environment:

My grandfather can't stand faggots. My grandfather is closed-minded. He says that after having a drugged out kid, having a faggot kid is... that. My uncle can't stand them either. Because he's very macho, he's disgusted by them. If I, for example, make jokes and everything, "Oh, you have a beautiful little ass!" And he can stand sissy jokes, but... [...]. Men disgust me, it's not that they disgust me [thinking fast], yes, they disgust me, but it's not that, what a disgust! (Raúl).

Ethnicity seems to be one of the factors explaining this rejection of sexual diversity and the ways of living it. In the face of this, the children interviewed also recognize the importance of affective-sexual education as one of the best tools to combat the lack of respect for people based on their sexual and/or gender identity, and their sexual orientation, although there is still educational work to be done:

Because before, I couldn't even see gays. But seeing [...] what you said, well.... If they are like that, then let them be like that, but I don't want to know anything about them, because I have a friend of mine [...] he has a boyfriend and he is the nicest boy there is, that boy is very nice and has a boyfriend, but he is different, he has a boyfriend, but not.... (Javi).

Forrest (2000) also finds greater hostility among boys than among girls in dealing with prejudice against homosexuality. However, studies such as McCormack's (2014) show a decrease in homophobic attitudes on the part of working-class boys, which could be attributed to a commitment to affective-sexual education where recognition of sexual diversity occupies a central space (Sex Education Forum, 2006; Ketting and Ivanova, 2018).

Discussion and conclusions

Currently, feminist and gender studies place the analysis of masculinities at the center of debates on democracy, equality and social justice. Along the same lines, the aim of this article was to analyze the representation of sexuality in adolescent masculinities, taking into account their social context of reference (social class). For this purpose, the theory of adolescent male subject becoming has been followed through the complementary processes of socialization and sexual and gender subjectivation that, in turn, are related to processes of reproduction and social change (Venegas, 2017). Hence the need to examine those processes of becoming a subject that underlie beneath the surface of masculinity defined here as a mask.

To this end, the article has begun by analyzing patriarchal models of hegemonic (Connell, 1987) or dominant masculinity (Bourdieu, 2005), according to gendered social norms (Harris, 1995) which, together with the general privilege granted to men, impose an internal hierarchy on this social category. More recently, people have begun to speak of inclusive masculinity (Anderson and McCormack, 2018).

With this background framework, the article has offered an analysis based on 26 in-depth personal interviews from three case studies, to learn about the mask that is adolescent masculinities (12-18 years old). The results reveal that sexuality is for adolescents a social space where they construct their masculinity as a mask built on the conflict between sexual desire, the pressure to be sexually active, sexual practices –especially coital– and the fears, fears, doubts and anxieties that all this raises, further seasoned by feelings of infatuation and romantic love, in the context of their affective-sexual relationships.

The dimensions that represent sexuality in the discourses of the adolescents interviewed account for the messages –the social norms of gender– that boys hear (Harris, 1995) since they are born, and that direct the process of becoming a subject (Venegas, 2017). Thus, the construction of their masculinity is activated as a mask (Haste, 2013) in which class belonging is also present.

When analyzing what lies beneath the surface of that mask, we find that it is not a flat and linear process, but the activation of processes of adhesion, accommodation and rupture with the gender norm, materialized by dominant masculinity, in the quest towards his formation as a “real man” (Sex Education Forum, 2006) in adulthood. In these processes, class, gender and ethnicity intersect as the three most relevant structuring principles of adolescent sexual identity and practices (Venegas, 2018).

The mask that is adolescent masculinity is the result of the conflict and contradictions with which adolescent subjects manage, on the one hand, the norms internalized in their sexual and gender socialization, and, on the other, those that give content to the resistance that is activated in their sexual and gender subjectivation. Adolescent masculinity is thus a model of being a male social subject, of becoming a man, in which –in the specific case in this article– the hegemonic patriarchal sexuality, sexist, homophobic, rude, without erosions or cracks, without doubts, without showing emotions or weakness (Willis, 1988 and 2003; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Bourdieu, 2005; Forrest, 2000; Richardson, 2010), internalized in socialization, increasingly clashes with an inclusive masculinity (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.

To that end –and with that claim this article concludes– it is essential to bet on a comprehensive model of affective-sexual education (Ketting and Ivanova, 2018), holistic, democratic, that promotes sexual and gender equality, and with it social justice (Venegas, 2011c).

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Annex

Table 1

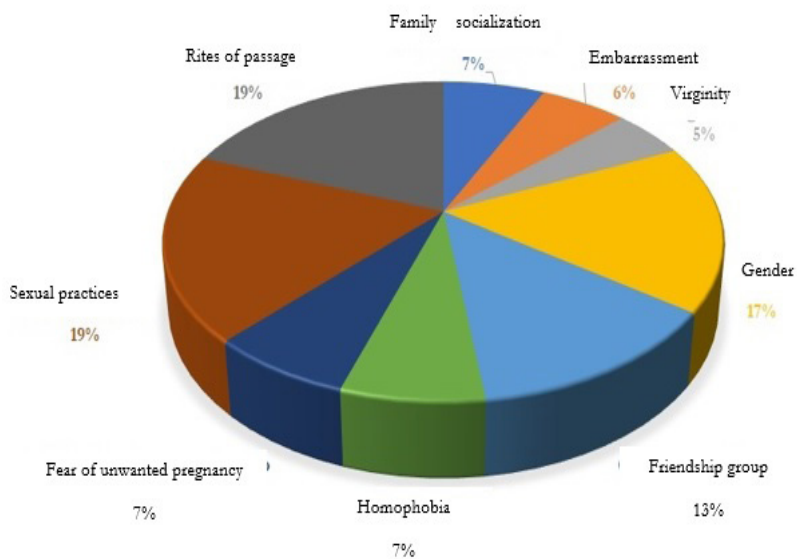
Profile of the subjects interviewed in the three investigations

Fictitious name	Age	Social class	Ethnicity	Year	Nationality
Mario	15	Worker	Caucasian	2006	Spanish
Raúl	17	Worker	Mestizo	2006	Spanish
Raimundo	18	Worker	Gypsy	2006	Spanish
Guille	17	Worker	Caucasian	2006	Spanish
Jose	15	Worker	Caucasian	2006	Spanish
Jorge	16	Middle class	Caucasian	2006	Spanish
Elías	17	Worker	Caucasian	2006	Spanish
Fran	17	Middle class	Caucasian	2007	Spanish
Alberto	15	Middle class	Caucasian	2007	Spanish
Juan	16	Middle class	Caucasian	2007	Spanish
Antonio	15	Middle class	Caucasian	2007	Spanish
Sergio	15	Middle class	Caucasian	2007	Spanish
Luis	17	Middle class	Caucasian	2007	Spanish
Tony	17	Middle class	Mestizo	2007	Spanish
Javi	17	Worker	Caucasian	2007	Spanish
Abel	14	Worker	Caucasian	2014	Romanian
Ernesto	13	Worker	N/A	2014	Bolivian
Jesús	12	Worker	Gypsy	2014	Spanish
Pablo	12	Worker	Caucasian	2014	Russian
Julio	15	Worker	Gypsy	2014	Spanish
Salva	14	Worker	Caucasian	2014	Spanish
César	14	Worker	Caucasian	2014	Spanish
Fidel	16	Worker	Caucasian	2014	Romanian
Nacho	14	Worker	Caucasian	2014	Spanish
Andrés	17	Worker	Caucasian	2014	Spanish
Rubén	16	Worker	Gypsy	2014	Spanish

Source: Own elaboration based on the interviews conducted.

Graph 1

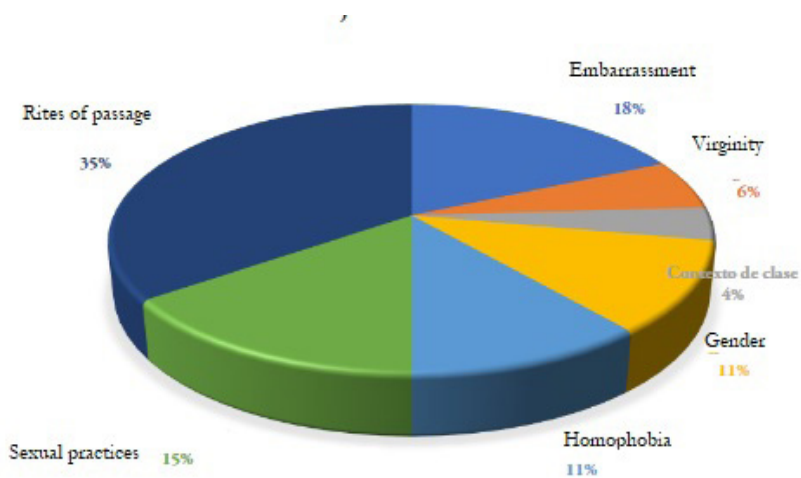
Dimensions representing sexuality in the discourses of middle-class subjects



Source: Own elaboration based on the interviews conducted.

Graph 1

Dimensions representing sexuality in the discourses of workers subjects



Source: Own elaboration based on the interviews conducted.

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