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FROM CIVILIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS TO THE CRISIS OF MASCULINITY: HELPLESSNESS, HEGEMONY, AND THE REINVENTION OF MANHOOD IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

DO MAL-ESTAR NA CIVILIZAÇÃO À CRISE DA MASCULINIDADE: DESAMPARO, HEGEMONIA E REINVENÇÃO DO SER HOMEM NA CONTEMPORANEIDADE

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Abstract: This article analyzes the so-called crisis of masculinity as a historically situated configuration of the malaise constitutive of contemporary life. It proceeds from the hypothesis that male suffering stems from the destabilization of a patriarchal promise: that obedience to the mandates of strength, provision, authority, heterosexuality, and invulnerability would guarantee recognition and dominance. This is a theoretical and bibliographic study, qualitative and interdisciplinary in approach, that brings together Freudian metapsychology, contemporary psychoanalytic contributions, and the critical field of studies on men and masculinities. The bibliographic material underwent thematic content analysis from Bardin's perspective, encompassing the stages of pre-analysis, exploration of the material, and interpretive treatment of the results. The analysis was guided by four operators defined a priori: helplessness, drive renunciation, hegemony, and identification. Drawing on Connell and Messerschmidt, hegemonic masculinity is understood as a relational, multiple, mutable, and hierarchical pattern, rather than a universal male personality. Drawing on empirical research on work and mental health, the study demonstrates that ideals of provision, self-sufficiency, and performance turn vulnerability into shame, hinder care-seeking, and encourage aggressive or self-destructive responses. It concludes that the crisis can function both as a defensive reaction to the loss of privileges and as an opening toward less rigid masculinities. Clinical practice and public policies are called upon to acknowledge suffering without restoring male sovereignty, while sustaining accountability, affective working-through, care, and gender democracy.

Keywords: malaise; masculinities; hegemonic masculinity; psychoanalysis; gender; psychological suffering.

Resumo: *O artigo analisa a chamada crise da masculinidade como uma configuração historicamente situada do mal-estar constitutivo da vida contemporânea. Parte-se da hipótese de que o sofrimento masculino parte da desestabilização de uma promessa patriarcal: a de que a obediência aos mandatos de força, provisão, autoridade, heterossexualidade e invulnerabilidade garantiria reconhecimento e domínio. Trata-*

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se de uma pesquisa teórico-bibliográfica, de abordagem qualitativa e interdisciplinar, que articula a metapsicologia freudiana, contribuições psicanalíticas contemporâneas e o campo crítico dos estudos sobre homens e masculinidades. O material bibliográfico foi submetido à análise temática de conteúdo, na perspectiva de Bardin, contemplando as etapas de pré-análise, exploração do material e tratamento interpretativo dos resultados. A análise foi orientada por quatro operadores definidos a priori: desamparo, renúncia pulsional, hegemonia e identificação. A partir de Connell e Messerschmidt, a masculinidade hegemônica é compreendida como um padrão relacional, múltiplo, mutável e hierarquizado, e não como uma personalidade masculina universal. O 1Doutorando e Mestre em Educação pela Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (UFPE/CAA). Psicólogo pelo Centro Univercitário do Vale do Ipojuca -Unifavip | Wyden. Pedagogo pela Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (UFPE/CAA).estudo, a partir de pesquisas empíricas sobre trabalho e saúde mental evidenciam que os ideais de provedor, autossuficiência e desempenho convertem a vulnerabilidade em vergonha, dificultam a busca por cuidado e favorecem respostas agressivas ou autodestrutivas. Conclui-se que a crise pode funcionar tanto como reação defensiva à perda de privilégios quanto como abertura para masculinidades menos rígidas. À clínica e às políticas públicas cabe acolher o sofrimento sem restaurar a soberania masculina, sustentando responsabilização, elaboração afetiva, cuidado e democracia de gênero.

Palavras-chave:*mal-estar; masculinidades; masculinidade hegemônica; psicanálise; gênero; sofrimento psíquico.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The idea of crisis refers, rather, to the difficulty of sustaining a historical model of recognition that associated masculinity with strength, economic provision, authority within the family, sexual activity, rationality, and the rejection of vulnerability. When these coordinates cease to function as unquestionable guarantees, some men experience disorientation, shame, and resentment; others find an opportunity to build less hierarchical relationships. The same disruption can therefore fuel authoritarian restorations or processes of reinvention.

The source text from which this article originates rightly situates the issue within the Freudian horizon of discontent. Collective life does not eliminate helplessness; while offering protection, belonging, and language, it also demands renunciations and imposes limits on satisfaction. Conflict is not an accident that a fully organized society could abolish. It is integral to the very constitution of the subject and returns in singular forms of guilt, anxiety, symptoms, and aggressiveness. Freud's decisive contribution consists in removing the expectation of a

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total solution to suffering: civilization manages tensions that it itself produces, but cannot definitively reconcile drive and norm (Freud, 1988).

This structural formulation, however, does not warrant reducing every historical period to the same experience. Discontent is inevitable, but the ideals that organize it, the groups upon which its greatest demands fall, and the narratives available for interpreting it are historical. In the case of masculinities, patriarchy distributed real privileges and simultaneously prescribed continual demonstrations of manhood. Being recognized as a man depended on distancing oneself from femininity, demonstrating mastery over oneself and others, proving productivity and heterosexuality, and enduring pain without asking for help. There is no contradiction in asserting that this regime benefits men as a group while exacting high psychological costs from concrete subjects; the problem arises when suffering is used to erase the asymmetry of power.

Oliveira (1998) warned that part of the discourse on masculinity turns men into victims of their own roles without questioning the domination that these roles sustain. This critique remains relevant. A sound approach must avoid both the naive celebration of the "new man" and nostalgia for a lost virility. Changes in appearance, greater domestic participation, or a willingness to speak about feelings do not, in themselves, signify a redistribution of power. The decisive question is not only whether men suffer under masculine mandates, but how they work through this suffering: by taking responsibility and reconsidering privileges, or by turning frustration into control, misogyny, homophobia, and violence.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity provides a bridge between the subjective dimension and the social order. Connell and Messerschmidt (2021) revisit it as a tool for investigating practices that legitimize gender hierarchies in concrete contexts. Hegemony does not correspond to a fixed list of traits, nor does it describe all men. It indicates a culturally valued pattern, sustained by institutions, relationships, and forms of consent, in relation to which subordinate, marginalized, complicit, or oppositional masculinities are positioned. This perspective makes it possible to understand why the crisis does not affect everyone in the same way: race, class, generation, territory, sexual orientation, corporeality, and labor market participation modify resources, vulnerabilities, and possibilities for response.

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The aim of this article is to analyze how the contemporary crisis of masculinity can be understood as a historically situated form of civilization's discontents. Specifically, it seeks to distinguish the structural conflict between drive and culture from the social configurations that give it contemporary expression; examine hegemonic masculinity as a promise of recognition and an apparatus of power; discuss contemporary manifestations of male suffering; and indicate ethical consequences for psychoanalysis, expanded clinical practice, and care policies. The hypothesis advanced is that what is underway is not the disappearance of masculinity, but the loss of the self-evident status of a model that claimed to speak on behalf of all men.

2. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This is a theoretical and bibliographic study with a qualitative approach and a critical and interpretive character. The main corpus brings together the source text, classics such as Civilization and Its Discontents (1930 [1929]), Totem and Taboo (1913 [1912-1913]), Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (1921), Gender Trouble (2015), and recent studies such as those by Connell, Messerschmidt (2021), Ambra (2018), Neves (2019), among others.

Methodologically, the thematic content analysis proposed by Bardin (2016) was adopted and adapted to the theoretical and bibliographic nature of the research. This choice made it possible to organize the corpus systematically, identify recurring nuclei of meaning, and interpret the connections between civilizational discontent and the crisis of masculinity. During pre-analysis, an initial exploratory reading of the selected works was conducted, followed by the delimitation of the corpus and the definition of analytical objectives. During the exploration of the material, recording units related to male suffering, civilizational demands, gender norms, and processes of subjective constitution were identified. During the treatment and interpretation stage, recurrences, tensions, convergences, and shifts in the authors' arguments were examined.

The analysis was guided by four theoretical operators defined a priori: helplessness, drive renunciation, hegemony, and identification. These operators functioned as analytical categories, allowing the nuclei of meaning found in the corpus to be coded and grouped. Helplessness made

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it possible to understand the absence of an ultimate guarantee capable of ensuring the subject's stability; drive renunciation made it possible to situate the conflicts and subjective costs arising from entry into culture; hegemony guided the analysis of the unequal distribution of prestige, recognition, and power among masculinities and genders; and identification made it possible to examine the relational, historical, and nonessential character of sexuated positions. Although defined in advance on the basis of the theoretical framework, these categories were not applied rigidly, as they remained open to contradictions, overlaps, and meanings emerging from the material.

The choice of these operators also made it possible to preserve the epistemological specificity of the fields drawn upon. The intention was not to merge psychoanalysis and gender studies into a single theory, but to bring them into dialogue through categorical and interpretive analysis. Whereas psychoanalysis contributed to questioning helplessness, subjective division, drive renunciation, and the singularity of identificatory processes, critical gender studies highlighted how norms, institutions, and inequalities participate in producing the available forms of male experience. Bardin's content analysis thus provided a methodological procedure capable of organizing dialogue between the frameworks without erasing their differences, connecting the subjective, historical, cultural, and political dimensions of the crisis of masculinity.

3. DISCONTENT AS A CONDITION OF THE CIVILIZATIONAL BOND

In Civilization and Its Discontents, Freud (1988) begins with a question that remains decisive: why do human beings, despite the resources developed to protect themselves from nature and regulate their relationships, fail to achieve lasting happiness? The answer shifts the problem from individual moral failure to the ambivalent structure of culture. Civilization protects against powerlessness and organizes coexistence, but restricts satisfaction and requires aggressiveness to be contained, redirected, or internalized. The subject does not enter a neutral order; rather, the subject is constituted through prohibitions, identifications, and ideals that make the bond possible while also producing guilt and dissatisfaction.

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The opposition between drive and civilization does not mean that, before culture, there existed a complete individual who was subsequently artificially repressed. The Freudian subject is born into radical dependence and is traversed by language, care, and the expectations of others. Initial helplessness does not disappear in adulthood: it is managed through loving bonds, beliefs, institutions, affiliations, and projects. When these supports falter, it becomes apparent that no authority can fully guarantee meaning, love, or protection. The experience of crisis brings this lack of guarantees into the present and mobilizes attempts to reconstruct certainties through leaders, rigid identities, or communities imagined as homogeneous.

Totem and Taboo offers a mythical narrative of the passage from the sovereignty of the primal father to shared law. More important than taking the murder of the father literally is recognizing the conceptual operation: prohibition does not derive simply from the strength of a present leader; it comes to be sustained by the group's own members, bound together by guilt, identification, and renunciation (Freud, 1996a). In Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, Freud (1996b) extends this analysis by showing how horizontal identification among members depends on placing the same object in the position of the ideal. Collective authority therefore combines libidinal bonds, promises of protection, and submission to ideals.

Patriarchal masculinity can be read as one of these idealized formations. It offers boys and men an anticipatory answer to helplessness: be strong, autonomous, a provider, and a desiring subject; occupy the position of the one who protects, decides, and does not depend on others. The promise is seductive because it turns vulnerability into a project of domination. However, because no subject fully coincides with the ideal, virility must be repeatedly proven. Masculine recognition becomes unstable and often depends on the gaze of peers, family approval, professional performance, sexual potency, and the ability to distance oneself from everything coded as feminine.

From this perspective, the crisis does not begin only when women enter the labor market or when sexual rights expand. It is latent in the very impossibility of fully realizing the ideal. Social transformations make this impossibility more visible and deprive traditional compensations of legitimacy. A man may work and be unable to provide; he may exercise

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authority and not be obeyed; he may desire and fail to meet the standard of potency; he may form a family without occupying its sovereign center. What was previously attributed to private failures emerges as the inconsistency of a social norm that promised more than it could deliver.

Birman (2003) helps us think through the passage from a vertical cartography, centered on sovereign authorities, to more horizontal and unstable forms of regulation. This does not imply the disappearance of law or the automatic dissolution of all reference points. What is weakened is the fantasy that a single center would organize experience. In societies traversed by individualism and the imperative of performance, each subject is called upon to produce themselves and is held individually responsible for successes and failures. Helplessness, then, is no longer merely contained by tradition; it is also exploited by markets that offer identities, bodies, lifestyles, and techniques of improvement as consumable solutions.

For men, this logic intensifies a contradiction. The classical ideal demands self-sufficiency; the contemporary economy, however, multiplies precarious dependencies and renders employment, income, and recognition uncertain. The individual is invited to prove their worth through results they do not entirely control. Masculinity can turn this contingency into personal shame: unemployment becomes an inability to be a man; psychological suffering becomes weakness; the need for care becomes moral failure. Aggressiveness, which Freud locates as a central problem of civilization, thus finds gendered scripts that authorize its projection onto women, children, subordinated men, or one's own body.

4. MASCULINITY: IDENTIFICATION, NORM, AND HEGEMONY

Connecting discontent and masculinity requires abandoning anatomical determinism. Masculinity and femininity are not automatic outcomes of sexed bodies, and psychoanalysis offers resources for this shift when it distinguishes drive from instinct. Drive has no naturally predetermined object; its satisfaction depends on the libidinal history and singular circuits constructed by the subject. Lima and Vorcaro (2020) emphasize the denaturalizing potential of this formulation, while acknowledging that psychoanalytic traditions have also reproduced

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pathologizing vocabularies and heterosexual norms. The Freudian legacy therefore needs to be critically worked through, rather than used as an authority immune to history.

Neves (2019) demonstrates that psychoanalysis becomes a normalizing practice when it ignores the historical variability of its concepts, treats theory as external to power relations, and uses sexual difference to prescribe destinies. Conversely, dialogue with gender theories can broaden analytic listening without reducing the unconscious to a sociological construction. The clinical question ceases to be which identity would be correct and instead investigates how each subject relates to the available designations, what conflicts these designations organize, and what forms of suffering are produced when life does not fit the expected script.

Ambra's (2018) contribution is especially fruitful at this point. By bringing Lacanian identification into dialogue with performativity, the author proposes understanding gender as a reiterated response to the desire of the Other. Identity does not precede acts; it stabilizes retrospectively through bodily, linguistic, and relational repetitions (Butler, 2015). Anatomy participates in this process, but does not speak for itself: it receives meanings within familial, medical, and social discourse. In synthesis, "sexual identities are [...] what subjects offer to the Other in the hope of filling a lack that constitutes them" (Ambra, 2018, p. 49). The quotation does not define an essence, but highlights address and the demand for recognition.

This formulation helps explain why masculinity can acquire a compulsory character. Boys learn that certain gestures, affects, games, clothes, desires, and bodily positions will be recognized as masculine, whereas others may expose them to supposed ridicule or exclusion. The peer group functions as an everyday tribunal of virility. In the collection edited by Olavarría (2003), Latin American studies show how adolescence, sexuality, risk, work, violence, and fatherhood participate in the public validation of becoming a man. Masculinity is not merely felt internally; it is negotiated within relationships and institutions that distribute belonging and sanctions.

The concept of hegemony prevents this diversity from being turned into a neutral inventory of styles. Connell and Messerschmidt (2021) advocate four moves: developing a more complex account of gender hierarchy; recognizing the local, regional, and global

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geography of masculinities; considering embodiment and the body; and examining the dynamics through which dominant patterns are transformed. Hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily the most common. It is the configuration that, in a given context, legitimizes men's superiority and the subordination of women and devalued masculinities, such as homosexual or transsexual masculinities. Its power depends on coercion as well as consent, imitation, aspiration, and complicity.

Oliveira (1998) anticipates a warning consistent with this revision: making male behaviors more flexible does not amount to undoing hierarchies. A man may attend to his appearance, participate in raising children, or declare himself sensitive while still retaining prerogatives in the division of labor, sexuality, and decision-making. The category of the "new man" must therefore be examined in light of class, race, and access to resources. Men with greater economic and cultural capital may adopt elements associated with femininity without losing recognition, whereas marginalized men may resort to virility as one of the few available sources of status. This is not a matter of justifying male chauvinism through poverty, but of locating its different conditions of reproduction.

5. FROM THE CRISIS OF MASCULINITY TO THE CRISIS OF HEGEMONY

The expression crisis of masculinity gained prominence when social transformations shook the male monopoly over public spaces, paid work, familial authority, and the legitimate definition of sexuality (Ceccarelli, 1998). Feminist and LGBTQIA+ movements did not create men's discontent; they rendered contestable privileges and exclusions previously regarded as natural. This distinction is fundamental. Holding women and dissident subjects responsible for the crisis turns the loss of an exclusive position into an unjust injury and fuels the fantasy of restoration. Recognizing the historicity of the model makes it possible to understand that equal rights do not deprive men of their humanity: they remove the guarantee of centrality.

Silva (2006) had already proposed reading the crisis as a critique of fixed identities and of masculinist literature that universalizes the standpoint of particular men. The singular "man" conceals differences between Black and white men, heterosexual and gay men, cisgender and trans men, formally employed and unemployed men, young and older men, and urban, rural,

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and Indigenous men. The crisis has different degrees of intensity: for some, it means a loss of authority; for others, an intensification of precarity; for still others, an opening to experience forms of affection and desire previously punished. An adequate theory must grasp these simultaneities without establishing a universal male experience.

It is more precise to speak of a crisis of hegemony than a crisis of masculinity. Hegemony enters into crisis when its statements no longer secure automatic consent and when subordinate practices influence the dominant pattern. This does not mean that domination has ended. Old and new models coexist, combine, and may produce hybrid masculinities: egalitarian discourses coexist with a refusal to share care effectively; the valorization of affectionate fatherhood may coexist with marital control; a less rigid aesthetic may conceal the persistence of privileges. Change is real, but contradictory.

Recent research with university students in southern Chile illustrates this coexistence. Alongside mandates of protection, professional success, and heterosexual virility, Arias-Lagos and Peña-Axt (2025) found narratives that question traditional roles and affirm gender equality. This finding challenges both the idea of absolute continuity and that of complete replacement. Generational processes do not produce a simple evolutionary line toward "better" masculinities; they offer competing repertoires that subjects articulate according to their relationships, trajectories, and social positions.

The crisis also involves the decline of the imaginary association between man, phallus, and power. In part of the psychoanalytic literature, this shift has been described as the failure of the paternal function. This interpretation must be used cautiously so as not to turn patriarchy into a condition of symbolization. The function of limit, difference, and separation does not naturally belong to the male father, nor does it depend on male supremacy. Confusing symbolic function with patriarchal authority leads to diagnosing diverse families, women's autonomy, and gender dissidence as symptoms of social disorder. Neves's (2019) critique demonstrates the clinical and political risk of this operation.

From the subject's standpoint, the loss of a phallic guarantee may be experienced as intolerable castration, but also as an encounter with a fact that has always been present: no one

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possesses the signifier capable of completing the Other. The problem is not that men have suddenly been castrated by modernity; it is that certain social arrangements masked lack through privileges and asymmetries. When the veil is torn, it becomes possible to take responsibility for one's own desire without requiring women, children, or partners continually to confirm masculine potency.

The word crisis thus retains a productive ambivalence. It names suffering, conflict, and the risk of regressive responses, but also a moment of decision. If interpreted as the unjust loss of a right to command, it encourages resentment and violence. If worked through as the denaturalization of an impossible ideal, it allows male experience to expand: asking for help, caring, depending on others, failing, desiring in nonnormative ways, participating in domestic life, and building intimacy without experiencing this as degrading feminization. The crisis does not guarantee transformation; it merely opens a contested field.

6. CONTEMPORARY EXPRESSIONS OF MALE DISCONTENT

6.1 Work, provision, and social value

Work remains one of the main supports of masculine identity. The provider norm promises belonging, autonomy, and authority to those who support themselves and their families. In contexts of unemployment, informality, and unstable income, this promise becomes an intense source of humiliation. In research with men using psychosocial care services, Albuquerque (2024) shows that the absence of work is interpreted as a diminishment of their very status as men. A man's worth is conflated with productivity and purchasing power, such that class marginalization operates alongside the ideal of masculinity in the co-production of suffering.

This finding makes it possible to update the Freudian reading. Discontent is not merely sexual renunciation in the face of the law; it also involves the performance demands that organize the ego ideal. The subject compares himself with a model of success and internalizes as guilt what also results from economic inequalities. Neoliberal culture individualizes failure: unemployment, indebtedness, and precarity appear to demonstrate personal incapacity, even

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though they are collective phenomena. When speaking about suffering threatens the image of self-sufficiency, a man may fall silent, isolate himself, or turn social powerlessness into private aggressiveness.

6.2 Body, sexuality, and performance

The contemporary male body also becomes a site of surveillance. Demands for youth, muscular definition, aesthetic consumption, and sexual performance are added to the traditional mandate of strength. Apparent flexibilization does not extinguish the norm; it frequently multiplies the criteria of assessment. The subject must be strong without seeming brutish, sensitive without losing authority, attentive to appearance without crossing boundaries that peers regard as feminine, open to affection, and permanently potent. The plurality of models may expand choices, but also produce the feeling that no performance is sufficient.

According to Lima; Vorcaro (2020), sexuality concentrates this impasse because erections, initiative, and the number of experiences still function as public or imaginary proofs of masculinity. When performance fails, anxiety may be experienced as a global loss of identity rather than a situated bodily event. Psychoanalysis contributes by displacing desire from the logic of efficiency. If drive has no natural object and sexuation does not necessarily coincide with identity, anatomy, or orientation, clinical practice should not restore a virile standard, but investigate what demand for recognition organizes suffering.

6.3 Affects, violence, and care-seeking

Male upbringing often impoverishes the affective vocabulary by tolerating anger and contempt while punishing fear, sadness, tenderness, and dependence. This does not mean that men feel less; it means that certain affects have less legitimacy and find fewer pathways to symbolization. Acting out may take the place of speech: abusive consumption of alcohol and other drugs, exposure to risks, aggression, control over partners, isolation, or violence against oneself. The association between masculinity and invulnerability turns the acknowledgment of pain into an additional threat, causing the subject to suffer also because he suffers.

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In a narrative study with men receiving care in mental health services, Rocha and Zucchi (2025) identified aggressiveness, violence, and suicide attempts in biographies marked by personal and professional failure. The accounts revealed the influence of the ideals of provision, self-sufficiency, and invulnerability and, in some cases, the attribution of suffering to female figures. This finding is clinically important: the pain is real, but its explanation may reproduce misogyny and conceal precarity, paternal abandonment, the absence of support networks, and barriers to accessing public policies. Listening does not amount to confirming the defensive narrative; it involves acknowledging suffering and working on the forms through which responsibility is assumed.

The authors also show that care-seeking tends to occur when suffering becomes unbearable. Postponement protects virility at the imaginary level, but increases risks and reduces opportunities for early intervention. After access to care, movements of adherence and contestation emerge: some men find language and bonds through which to work through experiences; others manage medications or abandon activities to preserve work, control, and sexual performance. Effective care must consider these gender norms without stereotyping all service users and without reducing treatment to the correction of male behaviors.

6.4 Digital platforms and entrepreneurship of the self

Digital platforms have expanded the circulation of vocabularies concerning "toxic masculinity," emotional intelligence, and relationships. This visibility can offer recognition to men who previously could not find words for their experiences and encourage criticism of violence. At the same time, the logic of social networks tends to condense complex conflicts into identities, formulas, and promises of rapid transformation. Discontent becomes a market niche: influencers, courses, and communities offer scripts for regaining autonomy, controlling emotions, improving affective performance, and becoming a supposedly healthy version of a man.

In analyzing male advice pages on Instagram, Denkin and Balieiro (2023) show that the questioning of patriarchal patterns can be connected to entrepreneurship of the self.

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Overcoming "toxic" masculinity appears linked to the consumption of therapeutic practices and the individual construction of an autonomous, self-fulfilled subject. There is an important ambivalence: content may legitimize feelings and nonviolent relationships, but also repackage self-sufficiency in therapeutic language. Instead of questioning collective conditions, the division of care, and inequalities, the solution returns as a private investment that a man must make in himself.

This commodification updates the patriarchal promise without necessarily repeating it in its traditional form. Domination over women may give way to absolute mastery over one's own emotions, body, and career; invulnerability reappears as the efficient management of vulnerability. Clinical practice oriented by discontent rejects the fantasy of total optimization. Working through does not mean becoming immune to dependence, loss, or ambivalence, but developing ways of moving through them without violence and without demanding impossible guarantees. The value of digital and collective spaces must therefore be assessed by their capacity to encourage bonds, responsibility, and relational transformation, rather than merely to sell an updated masculine identity.

7. ETHICAL, CLINICAL, AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

A clinical practice addressing male discontent should not constitute a new specialty based on an essence of man. Its point of departure is singularity, but a singularity traversed by discourses and inequalities. Asking how the subject learned to be recognized as a man, which affects were forbidden to him, what place work and sexuality occupy in his ideal, and how he responds to the loss of control broadens analytic listening. At the same time, analysts must question their own assumptions so as not to turn heterosexuality, the patriarchal family, or cisgender identification into normal outcomes of analysis.

Lima and Vorcaro (2020) propose sustaining the subversive potential of psychoanalysis without ignoring critiques arising from gender studies. This position avoids two reductions: subordinating clinical practice to identities regarded as fully transparent, or using subjective division to disqualify political designations. "Man," "woman," "gay," "trans," and other

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categories are signifiers that enable belonging, rights, and intelligibility, but do not exhaust the subject. Analytic listening can respect self-definition while simultaneously investigating conflicts, fantasies, and modes of jouissance, without assuming that truth lies ready-made in the label or in opposition to it.

In work with men, acknowledgment and accountability must go hand in hand. Suffering caused by unemployment, separation, racism, homophobia, poverty, or loss of status should not be minimized. However, understanding it does not legitimize controlling female partners, abandoning children, assaulting others, or demanding the restoration of privileges. Ethical intervention helps distinguish vulnerability from victimization: the former acknowledges dependence, limits, and the need for care; the latter may function as a narrative that exonerates the subject and shifts all blame onto women, feminisms, or minorities.

Public policies in health, education, and social assistance can create collective conditions for this working-through. Services accessible at suitable hours, proactive outreach, men's groups, initiatives in schools and workplaces, and staff training on gender encourage bonds. However, adapting messages to the language of virility is insufficient, as though care needed to be sold as a new demonstration of strength. The repertoire of recognition must be expanded: care, reciprocity, involved fatherhood, cooperation, pleasure free from performance demands, and the ability to ask for help should be legitimized as human experiences, rather than as concessions from masculinity to femininity.

Violence prevention requires acting before a critical situation arises. This includes nonsexist sexuality education, discussion of consent, work on jealousy and frustration, learning nonviolent conflict resolution, and criticism of the policing of masculinity among peers. Olavarría's (2003) collection shows that adolescence is a strategic period because risk practices and homosocial validation participate in identity formation. Effective interventions do not treat young people as potential aggressors by nature; they create spaces to question the benefits and costs of the available models and to experiment with more equitable relationships.

Gender democracy, an expression revisited by Connell and Messerschmidt (2021), offers a more consistent horizon than the abstract celebration of "new masculinities." The

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criterion of change is not a man's modern appearance, but the transformation of relationships: who cares, who decides, who can speak, who bears the cost of domestic labor, whose sexuality is recognized, and how conflicts are negotiated. A less rigid masculinity is not measured solely by declared sensitivity; it is measured by the willingness to share power and sustain alterity without turning it into a threat.

8. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The passage from civilization's discontents to the crisis of masculinity does not describe a simple causal sequence, but a change in analytical scale. Freud enables us to understand that the conflict between satisfaction, limits, aggressiveness, and the social bond is constitutive. Gender and masculinity studies show that this conflict assumes historical forms, distributes power unequally, and offers specific scripts of recognition. Hegemonic masculinity was one such script: it promised protection against helplessness through strength, autonomy, provision, and domination, but could never eliminate lack and demanded continual demonstrations of virility.

Contemporary transformations strip this promise of its apparent naturalness. Women, feminisms, LGBTQIA+ movements, changes in family arrangements, and new forms of work do not cause the crisis as external agents that supposedly destroyed a healthy order. They expose contradictions, expand rights, and destabilize male exclusivity. The crisis becomes dangerous when the loss of centrality is interpreted as a humiliation that must be avenged; it becomes productive when it allows recognition that patriarchal authority is not a condition of the symbolic and that dependence, care, and vulnerability belong to everyone's experience.

The recent studies examined confirm that work, performance, and invulnerability continue to organize male suffering. Employment precarity may be experienced as a loss of the status of man; difficulty naming affects delays care-seeking; pain may manifest as aggressiveness, self-directed violence, or blaming the feminine. These manifestations do not warrant generalizations about all men, but reveal concrete effects of norms that intersect with

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class, race, generation, sexuality, and territory. Any intervention must therefore be situated and attentive to subordinated and marginalized masculinities.

It is concluded that the clinical and political task is not to reconstitute a single model of masculinity. It is to sustain conditions under which subjects can work through helplessness without turning it into sovereignty over the other. This involves listening to suffering, questioning privileges, encouraging accountability, and creating networks of care. The crisis of masculinity may then cease to be read as the decline of man and become an occasion to disentangle masculinity from violence, the power to dominate, and affective silence. This is not a matter of teaching a new masculine essence, but of expanding the ethical possibilities of existing, desiring, and living together.

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